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THE THEAETETUS AND  
PHILEBUS OF PLATO





# THE THEAETETUS AND PHILEBUS OF PLATO

TRANSLATED AND EXPLAINED

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## PREFACE

IN preparing the following translation and commentary I have had by me the edition of the *Theaetetus* by Prof. Lewis Campbell (2nd Edition: Oxford, 1883), and that of the *Philebus* by R. G. Bury (Cambridge, 1897), with Jowett's translation of both (3rd Edition: Oxford, 1892).

Jowett's translation of Plato has long been deservedly popular; but it bears some marks of haste. It is not, as a rule, close enough to the Greek, and at the same time the level of the style is very uncertain. Where it excels is in the happy rendering of phrases. I have noted such of these as I have ventured to borrow.

The main part of the commentary is original; and I believe that the remarks on the structure of the *Theaetetus*, the exposition of the argument as a connected whole, and the general interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Philebus* and its connexion with the "Theory of Ideas," are new.

H. F. C.





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# INTRODUCTION

## I

IN the present state of Platonic criticism it is, unfortunately, necessary to introduce even the briefest commentary with a statement of one's attitude towards the general question of the significance of Platonism.

The modern study of Plato begins with Schleiermacher, who published translations of all the dialogues (except the *Timæus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*), with introductions, in the years 1804 to 1828. From that time down, at least, to the closing years of the nineteenth century, there existed a definite traditional interpretation of Platonism, which it was orthodox to accept and heterodox to reject. It is best represented by Zeller's volume on Plato (Part II., section i. of his *Philosophie der Griechen*), the first edition of which appeared in 1846, and the fourth in 1889.<sup>1</sup> In a sense, this interpretation still holds the field. It has certainly no generally recognised competitor; the objections which, year by year, have accumulated against this or that point of the system have not yet resolved themselves into a complete and definite counter-system; and until such a counter-system has been developed the Zellerian tradition must be assumed to stand. But, in fact, its opponents nowadays so far outnumber its adherents that it exists on sufferance only; and it is hardly too much to say that at the present time the sole authoritative exposition of the Platonic philosophy is one in which nobody believes. Everyone can see that the traditional theory is false, but no one has the courage to cast it entirely aside and make a fresh beginning. It remains like a religion from which everything has departed but the ritual.

Nothing better illustrates the general bankruptcy of criticism than the fact that the commentators have turned,

<sup>1</sup> English translation of the third edition, London, 1876.

as a last resort, to "Sprachstatistik," or, as it is sometimes called in English, "Stylometry." A century ago Schleiermacher believed himself to have discovered that the whole series of the Platonic dialogues was constructed on a pre-conceived plan, and formed one closely-knit and consistent course of metaphysical exposition. The idea was essentially unnatural, and no one has maintained it since; but at least it showed a fine confidence in the possibility of understanding Plato's system as he understood it himself: whereas nowadays all hope of understanding it has apparently been abandoned, and it remains to count the occurrences of certain groups of words, and arrange the dialogues in a pattern according to the results obtained. In the University of Laputa Gulliver was shown a frame which was contrived to display, by the turning of various handles, every possible permutation of all the words in the language. Whenever three or four words occurred together in such a way as to make up a part of a sentence, they were transcribed and added to a collection, from which the inventor, a professor of the university, intended to compile "a complete body of all the arts and sciences." The method of "stylometry" as a device for the investigation of Platonism is on a level with this contrivance.

The main cause of this fiasco is to be found in the fact that no real attempt has been made to treat Platonism psychologically, to see it as the gradually developing thought of a human brain, starting from certain presuppositions, and proceeding by a reasonable and demonstrable process to certain conclusions. Though Schleiermacher's theory, according to which Plato spent the last fifty years of his life in working out a plan conceived before he was thirty, has found no supporters, the influence of his example is, nevertheless, felt to this day. Zeller and the orthodox commentators in general instinctively try to interpret the dialogues as if they formed a single self-contained system, and resist any attempt to show change and development. Dr Jackson is the first who has definitely broken with this tradition, by seeking to distinguish two separate and clearly-marked stages in the progress of



Plato's thought.<sup>2</sup> And this, however one may quarrel with the details of the reconstruction, is in itself a notable advance; for practically all the errors which vitiate the traditional interpretation may be traced back to the false perspective in which the dialogues have been viewed.<sup>3</sup> The later and more philosophical works have been misinterpreted in order to make them agree with those that are, in fact, early and tentative. The *Republic* has been taken as the standard of Platonism, and all other works have been measured against it.

Now the *Republic* is a glorious dialogue, written when Plato's imaginative genius was at its splendid zenith, but its artistic brilliance ought not to blind one to the fact that its philosophy is after all to a great extent a literary philosophy only—a philosophy in which metaphors are apt to take the place of arguments, and gaps in the thought are bridged by flights of fancy. If, by some magical agency, the *Republic* could be withdrawn from human ken for a generation, the results to the study of Plato would be anything but harmful. It would be no bad thing, indeed, if we could agree to forget for a moment that Plato was a moralist at all. It seems to me unquestionable that harm has been done by the great stress laid on this side of his philosophy; and I cannot but reflect that Platonism has been expounded chiefly by university professors, and that the most ardent lover of truth among professors is not always able to resist the impulse to edify his charges. Another result of the university system is that the professors have seldom or never been equally versed

<sup>2</sup> *Plato's Later Theory of Ideas*, a series of articles in the *Journal of Philology*, 1882 and later years.

<sup>3</sup> An entire misunderstanding of Aristotle's position towards his master has no doubt contributed to the same end. But if a sincere and unbiassed attempt had been made to construe Plato out of his own mouth it would have been seen at once that Aristotle was not only by nature incapable of comprehending him, but also animated in most of his criticisms by something very like malice. As Natorp has excellently said, the only point in the Platonic philosophy which he professes to accept, the setting of Form above matter, he regards as the discovery of Socrates which Plato merely mishandled (p. 371 of the book mentioned in note below).

in philosophy, in the history of Greek philosophy, and in the Greek language. But Plato will never be thoroughly understood until—to adapt a well-known saying in the *Republic*—all the commentators are philosophers, and all the philosophers are commentators.

Indeed, the philosophers proper have more than once made it clear that the Platonism of the commentators is not what they understand by a philosophical system. Before the modern study of Plato began, Kant had uttered a warning which ought to have spared us whole libraries of misinterpretation. At the beginning of the “Transcendental Dialectic” he gives a short vindication of the Platonic Idea, and after remarking that “Plato fand seine Ideen vorzüglich in allem, was praktisch ist,” he adds, in a note, “er dehnte seinen Begriff freilich auch auf spekulative Erkenntnisse aus . . . sogar über die Mathematik. . . . Hierin kann ich ihm nun nicht folgen, so wenig als in der mythischen Deduction dieser Ideen oder den übertreibungen dadurch er sie gleichsam hypostasirte, wiewohl die hohe Sprache, deren er sich in diesem Felde bediente, einer milderen und der Natur der Dinge angemessenen Auslegung ganz wohl fähig ist” (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*,<sup>2</sup> p. 371). Yet it is not too much to say that the governing principle of Zeller’s exposition is, that the less a statement approaches to “the nature of things” the more Platonic it is. The traditional Platonism is a wholly unphilosophical medley of myth, mysticism, false science, false psychology, and sentimental morality. The main thesis, which is taken chiefly from the *Republic*, is that the universe is somehow dependent on a series of general notions, which are “hypostatized,”—that is, conceived as real substances, existing in the spiritual world, and forming an interrelated system, with the Absolute Good at its head. These substantial notions are the famous Platonic Ideas. They consist of every imaginable sort of concept, from the merest abstract generalisation to the highest ideals of beauty and morality, and from the primary notions of number and quantity, to the types of natural species. There is the absolute good, absolute unity, the absolute man, the absolute

type of a plant, an animal, a house, a work of art, a science—anything and everything of which a general notion can be framed. And all these concepts we are to suppose as somehow connected together in an organic and intelligible whole, and somehow standing over against the world of phenomena—of space and time—in which we live, as the reality of which it is only the appearance, and the reasonable principle in obedience to which it is constructed. How the Idea and the phenomenon are, in fact, connected we are to suppose that Plato himself could never understand. There is, in Zeller's phrase, "No Deduction of the Sensible."

Stated in this bald way, the Platonism of the commentators is seen to be a philosophy *pour rire*. What Kant would have thought of it one can only guess; but Lotze's view is on record. "It is strange," says he, "how peacefully the traditional admiration of the profundity of Plato acquiesces in the ascription to him of so absurd an opinion" (*i.e.* a belief in the subsistence of substantial ideas apart from things). "We should have to abandon our admiration of him if this really was the doctrine he taught, and not rather a serious misunderstanding to which, in a quite intelligible and pardonable way, it has laid itself open."<sup>4</sup>

In the face of so absolute a divergence of opinion one might well suppose that Plato was one of the most mysterious thinkers that ever lived. Nothing is less true. There is no mystery about Plato. His philosophy is far easier to understand than that, for instance, of Aristotle; and nothing stands in the way of the reader who takes him up with an open mind, except the determination of the commentators to take the most extravagant expressions of his immature thought as literal statements of doctrine, and read them into anything and everything that he wrote. That any Greek—any Athenian at least—could be a mystic is unthinkable; and Plato is the supreme embodiment of the Athenian intellect. No doubt he had his beginnings; his thought was for a long time

<sup>4</sup> *Logic* (English translation: Oxford, 1888), vol. ii. p. 210. The whole chapter (pp. 433-449), which is headed "The World of Ideas," is of the greatest value for the understanding of Plato. See further, pages x.-xii.

tentative and obscure; he fell into confusions and inconsistencies; he trusted to intuition and instinct, where his reason had not yet found a secure footing. There are many passages in the *Republic* of which, as they stand, no coherent sense can be made, and which, therefore, are not now to be understood literally, whatever may have been in Plato's mind when he wrote them. But that Plato was ever vague *on principle*, that he ever *on principle* trusted to the obscure hints of the imagination, that he was ever deliberately sentimental, or deliberately mystical, is not to be believed: and in the two dialogues here presented, which contain probably as much real discovery, as much acute analysis, and as much constructive thought as any writings of the same length in the history of philosophy, there is, I believe, however difficult the argument may be, no positive obscurity of any kind whatsoever.

## II

I must now, as briefly as possible, set out what appears to me to be the main significance of the Platonic philosophy.

Plato was, in a word, the discoverer of the *a priori*. Almost every branch of philosophy as we now know it goes back to him, but it is above all as the discoverer of the *a priori*—of law in existence and the universal in knowledge—that he dominates the whole of human thought to this day.

All philosophy is an attempt to find a point of view from which the world can be understood. Even natural science is, in virtue of its primary assumptions (energy, mass, causality), a philosophy. The world, as presented to us in experience, confronts the reflecting mind at once with a contradiction. There is an element in it that we instinctively feel to be accidental—that might be so, or not so, without affecting the rest; and there is an element in it, or so, at least, we find ourselves compelled to believe, that is essential, fundamental, unchanging. The task that philosophy sets itself is to distinguish what in the universe is essential and what is accidental, to separate the reality



from the appearance. All philosophy, to put it in another way, is a search for what modern thinkers call the Absolute ; and it was Plato who invented the notion of the Absolute.

In the so-called Ionian school, with whom European philosophy begins, the instinct of comprehending the world and distinguishing the appearance from the reality, had expressed itself dimly in the assumption of an underlying element out of which the variety of the world we see had constructed itself, and to which it could be reduced. To Thales this underlying element was water ; to Anaximenes air ; and to Anaximander a still less substantial "indefinite." In Heraclitus and Parmenides the antithesis of the reality and the appearance is completely expressed. Heraclitus' famous doctrine that "all flows and nothing stands still" was, in effect, an assertion that there is no reality, nothing fundamental, nothing essential ; that all is relativity, accident, appearance ; that, in fact, the appearance is the reality. To Parmenides the world around was appearance, and nothing more ; and the reality was the bare form of the universe, as conceived by pure thought apart from all experience—namely, unity or abstract being, apart from time, space, and motion. These two may be called the great half-philosophers.

In Plato, the whole philosopher, we find the antithesis consciously conceived by a single mind.

The nature of Plato was probably better framed for comprehending the universe as a whole than that of any man who ever lived. He combined three characters that can rarely have met in such equal proportions in a single individual, and certainly never in so high a degree. He was one of the greatest artists in the world ; a man to whom the beauty of a thing was as real a fact as its existence, and who could himself create beauty as easily as he breathed. He had an intellect that analysed and refined with a sort of rapture at the mere exercise of reasoning : no theorem was too abstract, no problem too complicated, for his mind : he could classify the parts of speech or construct dichotomies *ad infinitum* like the merest scholastic, with the same ardour as he imagined the ideal republic or reconstructed the system of the stars. And there had descended

to him from his master Socrates so lofty a passion for morality and human perfection that, had he been anyone but Plato, he might well have spent his life preaching justice, temperance, and wisdom.

For the understanding of his philosophy it is necessary to realise that he combined the most intense and vivid feeling for the actual world around him, in all its fulness and variety, with an overmastering impulse to find in every thing what was permanent, fundamental, universal—in other words, what satisfied reason. In him, then, the antithesis of Heraclitus and Parmenides, of the world as appearance and the world as reality, became conscious, and, by becoming conscious, was already half resolved. An often-quoted epigram of Herbart expresses the result, not indeed quite accurately, but at least in a picturesque and striking way: "Divide the becoming of Heraclitus by the being of Parmenides, and you have the Platonic Ideas." The Platonic Idea is the synthesis of the Heraclitean world of appearance and the Parmenidean formula of reality.

And the meeting-point of the two tendencies, the middle term of the synthesis, was the Socratic concept.

When Plato began to take up into his thought the discoveries of his predecessors he had already one dominant motive in his mind—the habit of looking at everything under the form of the general notion which it represented, or to which it ought to correspond. It had been Socrates' constant and single aim to reduce the inconsequence of human conduct to a rational and harmonious consistency, by testing every action with reference to the general conception of his end that the agent was presumed to have in his mind.<sup>5</sup> The reality of justice, piety, courage, and all the conscious or half-conscious ideals of practical life—reality, that is, in the sense that all men had more or less vaguely some such standard to which they wished to conform—was already a matter of faith with Plato when he began to think out his own system. It was, accordingly in the Socratic concept, as the ideal by reference to which

<sup>5</sup> See further on Socrates note <sup>9</sup>, pp.12-13.

the infinite multiplicity of human actions was to be harmonised, unified, and rendered rational and intelligible, that he found the resolution of the contradiction between the element of appearance and mutability in things and the element of universality and reality.

In a neglected passage of the *Theaetetus* Plato gives, for once, an explicit statement of the history of his ideas. He is speaking of the conflict between "the professors of instability" (the Heracliteans) and "the partisans of the whole" (the Parmenideans), and he says: "In our gradual progress we have fallen unawares between the two parties" (180e). That could only have been said by a man who was conscious of having, in fact, transcended the standpoint of both schools, and reinterpreted their doctrines in a higher and more comprehensive system. Plato saw that either theory is true within its limits. It is true that the world as presented to us in sense-perception appears as a mere process of endless change; it is also true that there must somehow and somewhere be a changeless and identical reality that satisfies the demands of reason. The problem is to discern the permanence in the change, the identity in the diversity, the reality in the appearance. And this permanent and identical reality he found in the Socratic concept, which was thus reborn as the Platonic Idea.<sup>6</sup>

First, then, Plato conceived the antithesis of the universal and the particular more clearly and sharply than the champions of either; and secondly, he resolved the antithesis by declaring that it was only in virtue of the universal that the particular was what it was. In Hegelian language, Plato's judgment of the world took the form of an assertion that the particular is the universal. In other words, any single object in the world of our experience exists, and is intelligible to us, only as the embodiment of a universal, of the Idea.

In the first flush of his discovery, and before his beliefs

<sup>6</sup> The Greek word "Idea" (*idea, eidos*) means shape, form, type; and so kind, species. It has nothing of the modern meaning of a thing conceived in the mind alone. The original sense is vaguely present in the word "ideal," but in general it must be understood that an "Idea" is not an idea.

had taken the form of a connected and logical system, Plato's enthusiasm for the Idea as the *ideal*, the perfect type which nothing in this world can fully and adequately represent, unquestionably led him into many exaggerations of language. In a number of superb dialogues he devoted his whole powers to affirming the indefeasible reality and authority of the Idea and its independence of the actual world; and in doing so he certainly used many expressions to which his maturer judgment would not have assented. He goes so far as to speak of the Ideas as inhabiting a "supracelestial region," where the soul contemplates them by a sort of mystical intuition (*Phaedrus* 247c). He gives them, in short, or appears to give them (since in the end the notion is unthinkable), an actual substantial existence comparable to the existence of phenomena. And it is from these errors of enthusiasm, these metaphorical inaccuracies of immature thought, that the Zellerian school have constructed a dogmatic system.

Of course, if the Ideas are, *per impossibile*, really existing things, the whole theory is beset with insuperable difficulties. An Idea is a mere superfluity, to begin with.<sup>7</sup> But supposing we assume it, what is its relation to the world of phenomena? Zeller devotes sixteen pages (749-764) of his exposition to proving that, in the Platonic system as he understands it, there is "*Keine Ableitung des Sinnlichen*"—no deduction of the sensible world. Plato, we are to suppose, was so taken up with his suprasensible realities that he had no leisure to decide how they could possibly be related to the world in which he lived. One would have thought it impossible to repeat these absurdities after Lotze's discussion of the question; yet, as far as I know, the few pages of his *Logic* (first published in 1874), to which I have already referred, still remain the

<sup>7</sup> The traditional argument which shows this is known as the "third man," and is frequently used against Plato by Aristotle, though, as a matter of fact, it was invented by Plato himself in the *Parmenides*. The argument is that, if the resemblance between men requires an Idea of man to explain it, then the resemblance between men and the Idea requires an Idea to explain *that*, and so *ad infinitum*; which is absurd,—the truth being simply that "man begets man."

only reasonable account of the subject that has been published, except, indeed, Plato's own criticism of current misinterpretations of his doctrine in the first part of the *Parmenides*.<sup>8</sup> "The truth which Plato intended to teach is," says Lotze, "no other than . . . the validity of truths as such, apart from the question whether they can be established in relation to any object in the external world as its mode of being or not; the externally self-identical significance of Ideas, which always are what they are, no matter whether or no there are things which by participation in them make them manifest in this external world, or whether there are spirits which, by thinking them, give them the reality of a mental event. But the Greek language then, as afterwards, was wanting in an expression for this conception of Validity as a form of Reality, not including Being or Existence; and this very expression Being came, often, indeed, quite harmlessly, but in this instance with momentous consequences, to fill the place."<sup>9</sup>

The Ideas which, in Plato's words, are "present" in things, or in which things "participate," or which are types that things "imitate," are to be understood as laws. They are the reason which is in the universe, the formulæ, so to say, of its order, and system. The "imitation" of the Idea by phenomena, or their "participation" in it, are thought by the commentators to be the expression of some singular mystery which the mind of man can but dimly comprehend. And why? Simply because it

<sup>8</sup> I ought to add a third and quite recent exception, Prof. Paul Natorp's *Platos Ideenlehre, eine Einführung in den Idealismus* (Leipzig, 1903), which stands altogether apart from the ordinary run of books on Platonism. It is eminently philosophical in itself, and, what is more, treats Plato as a philosopher. Natorp, though he finds a shade of distinction between Lotze's view and his own, is no less certain than Lotze that the Idea is "a law, not a thing"—that it is properly an *a priori* "method" for the interpretation of experience. Unfortunately, he has not, in my opinion, done full justice either to the *Theaetetus* (except with regard to the categories) or to the *Philebus*. But for the *Parmenides* in particular, and the logical significance of the Ideal theory in general, his exposition is invaluable.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.* pp. 210-211.



happens that our modern metaphor is different ; because we speak of things as "obeying" laws, instead of embodying universal types. The notion of "law" is just as much a metaphor, and just as little a bare statement of fact, as the notion of the "Idea." It happens that the notion of law is familiar to us ; "but," as Lotze again says, "that there should be universal laws, which have not themselves existence like things, and which, nevertheless, rule the operation of things, remains, for a mind which realises its meaning, a profoundly mysterious fact which might well inspire rapture and wonder in its discoverer ; and that he should have made the discovery will always remain a great philosophical achievement of Plato, whatever the problems it may have left unsolved." <sup>10</sup>

### III

It has been necessary to say this much of the reality of the Ideas, because the *Theaetetus*, which discusses the nature of knowledge, cannot be understood by anyone who believes the Platonic Idea to be a substance. On the Zellerian theory, as in Plato's earlier dialogues, knowledge is an insoluble mystery. If the Ideas are these substantial forms dwelling altogether outside our experience, how are we ever to apprehend them at all ? At one time Plato made shift to explain the possibility of knowledge (or, as from our standpoint it would be truer to say, expressed his sense of difficulty of explaining it) by the hypothesis of some mystical intuition of the Idea by the soul in a previous state of existence. Obviously this is a mere expedient, a metaphor (whether precisely conceived as such or not) to take the place of an explanation still to be discovered. But in the *Theaetetus* we have left all this behind us. When Plato wrote (or, as I think, rewrote) the *Theaetetus* his philosophy was a complete and fully-developed system. The Idea is here conceived clearly and unmistakably as a law ; not, indeed, a law in the sense of a statement

<sup>10</sup> *Parmenides*, p. 218.

of invariable occurrences, but, as he says in the *Philebus* (64b), "an immaterial system governing" a particular existence,—the type, the formula, the equation one might almost say, of the class of phenomena which embodies it.

The knowledge to which the whole argument of the *Theaetetus* points is not an unintelligible communion with something out of the world, but the discovery of the Idea in the world, of reality in appearance, identity and permanence in instability and change. The Idea is not, indeed, presented to us in experience; it is thought into experience by the mind. As is said once for all in the *Philebus* (16d), "in all our inquiries we must always posit one type for every object of investigation, for we shall find it present in it." The Idea is not in things; it is thought into them by our reason. It is true that we could never find it in them, if it were not somehow there all the time—if there were not a reason in the world which our reason could comprehend; but it is not given to us in experience, and can, therefore, only be known *a priori*.

The *Theaetetus* is a deduction of *a priori* knowledge by means of a critique of experience. It is a demonstration of the insufficiency of the Heraclitean view of the world, a demonstration that nothing can be known except what the mind itself thinks into its experience, and that knowledge is, in effect, the imposition by reason, on the infinite variety of objects, of the universal forms which are the laws of their existence, and in virtue of which they are at once real and intelligible.

The dialogue may reasonably be regarded as the central point of Plato's work. He clearly intended it to be a comprehensive statement at once of his views on the fundamental problem of philosophy and of his position in relation to his chief predecessors and contemporaries. References may be traced, or inferred, to all the chief schools that sprang from Socrates. It is generally believed that the earlier arguments against Protagoreanism are a parody of a book on "Truth" that Antisthenes, the Cynic, he is reported to have written against Protagoras. Many, again, believe that the more complex of the theories ascribed to Protagoras are in reality the property of Aris-



tippus and the Cyrenaics. The Euclides of the prologue is probably the head of the Megarian school, and there are those who discern a supposed Megarian dialectic in the arguments of 163 *sqq.* But the doctrines of the Socratic schools are involved in endless controversy, with which, fortunately, we need not concern ourselves. It is enough to note the references as evidence of the importance which Plato attached to the dialogue.

But though the Socratics are continually in view, it is against Heraclitus that the polemic of the *Theaetetus* is really aimed.

What was the complete doctrine of "Heraclitus the Obscure" will always be a subject of dispute. Those of his actual sayings that have been preserved are for the most part of very doubtful meaning, and later interpreters, from Plato to Hegel, have read into them a good deal more than, in all probability, they ever contained. Three propositions, however, it is certain that he maintained: that there was a single element (which he called fire); that this element was in a state of unceasing and universal change from one form to another; and that the proportions between the quantity in the various forms was governed by "necessity" or "harmony." Of these three propositions it is that affirming unceasing change which was, or was taken to be, his characteristic doctrine. "All flows, and nothing remains still"; "you can never step twice into the same river"; "war is the father and ruler of all things"; "fire lives by the death of earth and earth by the death of fire": the whole world streams back and forth in a continual collision of opposites, and nothing remains the same from one moment to another. It is doubtful how far Heraclitus developed the consequence that nothing can be known, and that all our experience consists of a bare series of sense-impressions which are never twice alike, so that the mere identification of an object is, strictly speaking, an impossibility. Possibly it was left to his school to profess scepticism as a system; but it is as the typical sceptic, as the prophet of the world of appearance, contrasted with Parmenides, the idealist and prophet of reality, that Plato attacks him. He is the Hume to Plato's Kant, and we

need not here inquire whether all that is said of him is deserved or not; it is sufficient to understand the attitude of mind that, for the purpose of the *Theaetetus*, he is taken to represent.

I do not propose to anticipate the argument of the dialogue, because no small part of its charm consists in the unexpected way in which the successive conclusions are reached after a series of discursive and apparently random arguments. But something must be said about its form.

The *Theaetetus* as we have it is, in my opinion, a revised edition of an earlier dialogue. There are two or three sections in it which, as I have pointed out in the notes, are considerably superior in matter, and considerably inferior in form, to the main body of the work. These appear to be later additions; and it will be seen they have been inserted with a perceptible disregard of the unity of the whole.

The structure of the dialogue is as follows:—

	No. of Stephanus pages <sup>11</sup>
Prologue and Introduction (142-151d)	10
I. Sense perception—	
§ 1. The relativity of sense and the world of change (151e-155e)	10
§ 2. The same restated, and more completely analysed (155e-161b)	
§ 3. Preliminary criticism and defence of the doctrine (161b-165e)	10
§ 4. Detailed defence (165e-168c)	
§ 5. Detailed attack (168c-171d)	
§ 6. Digression on the philosophic life (171d-177c)	6
§ 7. Disproof of relativity on the basis of common-sense (177c-179c)	2
§ 8. <i>Reductio ad absurdum</i> of the Heraclitean flux (179c-184b)	5
§ 9. Deduction of the categories (184b-187b)	3
II. True and false opinion—	
§ 10. Abstract possibility of error (187b-191a)	}
§ 11. First psychological explanation of error (191a-196d)	
§ 12. Second psychological explanation of error (196d-200d)	
§ 13. Proof that true opinion is not knowledge (200d-201c)	

<sup>11</sup> See note on p. 1 below.

*This section now contains 15 Stephanus pages, but if we deduct two passages—the definition of error as “other-thinking” (189b-190e), and the discussion of knowledge as potential (197d-200c)—which appear to me on internal grounds to be later, and add the Epilogue, we are left with (as nearly as possible)*

III. The part and the whole—	10
§§ 14, 15. The knowledge of part and whole (201c-206b)	5
§ 16. Definition (206c-210b)	4
Epilogue	$\frac{1}{2}$

The sections that I have connected with brackets are evidently self-contained. There is a clear break in the course of the argument at the end of each, and each is characterised by an unmistakable style of its own. It will be seen that the first three as they stand, and Part II. in what I suspect to have been its original form, are exactly equal in length. It is inconceivable that this can have been due to chance; and when we find that the symmetry of the earlier half is disturbed in the later by passages wholly different in tone and matter from the rest, the conclusion seems irresistible that we have in the *Theaetetus*, as it has come down to us, an enlarged and altered edition of an earlier dialogue that was constructed on perfectly symmetrical lines. What exactly was the form of the original work it is impossible to say. It may have consisted of the four 10-page sections only. Or there may have been six in all: the introduction, and the two following sections as we have them, the solemn digression on the philosophic life for a centrepiece,<sup>12</sup> and two further sections, of which one is now embodied in Part II.—let us say, a Prelude, an *Andante*, a *Scherzo*, an *Adagio*, a set of variations, and a fifth (or fourth?) movement that is now lost. The analogy of music is the only one that does justice to the supreme accomplishment—the variety, the elegance, the mobility,

<sup>12</sup> Various attempts have been made to date the dialogue by supposed references in this section to contemporaries or to the literature of the day; but as some scholars put it very late and some very early—and it makes no practical difference either way—there is no need to discuss the question.

the restraint—the perfect combination of grace and precision, which characterise these portions of the dialogue.

It is remarkable that when Plato rewrote his work and inserted the metaphysical discussions that are, from the philosophical point of view, its finest parts, he cared so little for the original symmetry that he did not even take the slight trouble necessary to make the last section of all of the same length as the first three. But a *Theaetetus* with the form and beauty of the earlier dialogue and the profound insight of the later—a *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, let us say, with the form of the *G minor* Symphony—would have been a work so superhumanly great that even for Plato the achievement is unthinkable.

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# THEAETETUS

CHARACTERS OF THE DIALOGUE : EUCLEIDES, TERPSION ;  
SOCRATES, THEODORUS, THEAETETUS

## PROLOGUE

*Eucleides.* Are you fresh from the country, Terpsion ; 142  
or have you been here some time ? *Terpsion.* Some  
considerable time : and as it happens I was just looking  
for you in the market-place and wondering that I could  
not find you. *E.* The fact is, I was not in town. *T.*  
Where were you, then ? *E.* I was going down to the  
harbour when I met a party who were bringing Theaetetus  
from the camp at Corinth to Athens. *T.* Alive or dead ? *E.*  
Alive ; but only just alive. He is severely wounded, for one  
thing ; but he is suffering still more from the sickness that  
has broken out in the camp. *T.* You mean the dysentery ?  
*E.* Yes. *T.* What a man to be in danger of death ! *E.* A  
fine and noble character, Terpsion ; indeed it was only just  
now that I was hearing some people say great things of his  
conduct in the field. *T.* And no wonder : for that matter  
it would have been much more a wonder if he had not dis-  
tinguished himself. But how was it that he did not put up  
here at Megara ? *E.* He was in a hurry to reach home.  
As a matter of fact, I entreated and urged him against  
it, but he would not listen. So I saw him on his way ; and  
as I turned back again, I could not help remembering with  
astonishment what prophetic insight Socrates had shown in

The numbers in the margin are those of the pages of H. Stephanus' edition of Plato (Paris, 1578), which are generally used for reference. (The letters *a* to *e* in the references indicate the position in the page.) I have omitted the customary division into chapters (forty-four in the case of the *Theaetetus*), and introduced a briefer division into parts and sections. Names are given in full only when there is a change of speakers.

his case, as in so many others. It was just before his death, if I remember, that he met him, when Theaetetus was no more than a boy; and he had some conversation with him, and was greatly struck by his gifts. When I was at Athens, he repeated the conversation to me (and well worth hearing it was), and he said it could not but be that the boy would make a name for himself if he lived to be a man. *T.* Well, it seems he was right. But what was the conversation? Can you repeat it to me? *E.* No indeed. At least, not from memory. But I made some notes of it at the time, 143 as soon as I came home, while it was fresh in my mind; and afterwards I wrote it out at leisure, as I was able to recall it; and whenever I went to Athens I would ask Socrates whatever I could not quite remember, and make the corrections when I returned; so that now I have practically the whole discussion written out. *T.* Of course; I have heard you say so before, and I have long been meaning to ask you to show it to me, but always let the chance slip. Now why should we not go through it to-day? I am just inclined to take a rest after my journey. *E.* Well, I myself went with Theaetetus as far as Erineon, so that I should not mind a rest either. Let us go; and the slave shall read it to us while we are resting. *T.* Agreed.

*E.* This is the book, Terpsion. You must know that in writing the conversation out, I have represented Socrates, not as repeating it to me, but as speaking to his companions,—who were, he told me, Theodorus the mathematician and Theaetetus. I did not want the piece to be encumbered with parenthetical remarks; I mean when Socrates says of himself “and I agreed” or “I then said,” or of the other speaker “he assented” or “he objected”; so I omitted all this, and wrote it as if he were speaking to his companions in person. *T.* And quite right, too, Eucleides. *E.* Boy, take the book and read.

## INTRODUCTION

*Socrates.* If the people of Cyrene were nearest my heart, Theodorus, I should ask you for news of them and their



doings, and whether you have any young men at home who are devoting themselves to geometry or any other form of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> But in fact I care not so much for them as for our own folk, and I am more eager to know which of our young men promise to make a name for themselves. It is an inquiry I am ever pursuing, both for myself, as well as I can, and also by questioning those whom I see that the young men like to follow. You yourself have as many followers as any ; and rightly, for your gifts are many, and geometry not the least of them. If then you have happened on anyone worthy of mention, I would gladly hear of him. *Theodorus*. Indeed, Socrates, I ought certainly to tell you, and you ought certainly to hear, what an admirable boy I have met with among your Athenians. If he were beautiful, I should be ashamed to speak too highly of him, lest anyone should think I am in love with him : but in fact he is far from beautiful, and (you must not be angry with me) he is like you in the snubness of his nose and the prominence of his eyes, though to a less degree. So I speak without fear ; and you must know that of all I have ever met 144—and I have come across very many—I have never found anyone so astonishingly gifted. For that a boy should be quick of apprehension to a degree that few could equal, and at the same time uncommonly amiable, and withal brave beyond example, this I should never have thought possible ; and, indeed, I know of no other instance : for as a rule those who are quick, as he is, and sharp-witted and have good memories, are quick-tempered, too ; the gusts of their passions carry them along like unballasted boats, and their courage is less courage than frenzy ; while those who have more steadiness are somehow dull when they come to learn, and laden with forgetfulness. But this boy takes to his studies and inquiries so smoothly, so

<sup>1</sup> The style of the opening speeches is curiously formal (more so, I think, than in any other part of the dialogue, or at the opening of any other dialogue), and gradually becomes simpler and more easy. The purpose of this must be to make a contrast with the conversational tone of the prologue, and this incidentally proves that the prologue is not a later insertion, as suggested by Dr Jackson (*Journal of Philology*, vol. xiii. 1885, p. 244).

surely, with such complete accomplishment, and with so sweet a nature, too, like a stream of oil flowing without a sound, that you would never imagine it possible for one so young. *S.* This is good news! And whose son is he? *T.* I have heard the name, but forgotten it. However, here is the lad himself, the one in the middle of these who are coming up. He and these friends of his were anointing themselves just now in the outer court,<sup>2</sup> and now, I expect, they are coming here. Look and see if you know him. *S.* I know him. His father is Euphronius of Sunium—just such a man, my friend, as you tell me his son is; very well known, too, and not the least for the fortune he left. But I do not know the boy's name. *T.* He is called Theaetetus,<sup>3</sup> Socrates; but as for the property, I think I heard that some people who were the trustees had ruined it, which does not prevent the boy from being astonishingly liberal, Socrates. *S.* He must be a fine fellow. Will you ask him to come here and sit with me? *T.* Certainly. Theaetetus, come here to Socrates.

*Socrates.* Come by all means, Theaetetus, and let me see what I look like; for Theodorus here says you resemble me. Now if each of us had a lyre, and he said they were tuned alike, should we believe him without more ado, or should we first inquire whether he was speaking with musical knowledge?<sup>4</sup> *Theaetetus.* We should inquire first. *S.* And if we found he was a musician, we should believe him; but if not, not? *T.* Certainly. *S.* Well, then, if we are interested in this alleged resemblance of our features, we  
 145 must inquire if he speaks as a painter, or not. *T.* I think so. *S.* Then is Theodorus a painter? *T.* Not as far as I

<sup>2</sup> The scene is laid in a wrestling-school.

<sup>3</sup> Of Theaetetus' life nothing is now known except that he was one of the numerous distinguished mathematicians who gathered round Plato. He is said to have written a treatise on the five regular solids. It is difficult, as Campbell remarks, not to suppose that the Preface is an allusion to his death.

<sup>4</sup> It will be seen that in this opening cross-examination Socrates is, as it were, parodying his own method of discussion.

know. *S.* Or a geometrician either? *T.* Oh, that he is indeed. *S.* And an astronomer, a calculator, a musician, a man of all the accomplishments? *T.* I think so. *S.* Then if he says, whether in praise or blame, that we are alike in some external feature or other, we need not take too much notice of what he says? *T.* I suppose not. *S.* But what if it be the mind, and he praises either of us for virtue or wisdom? Should not the one who hears it be eager to look closely at the one who is praised, and he in turn to display his powers? *T.* Certainly, Socrates. *S.* Then, my dear Theaetetus, the hour is at hand for you to display and for me to watch; for I would have you know that though Theodorus has spoken to me in praise of many before now, Athenians and strangers alike, he has never yet praised anyone as he has just praised you. *T.* Well, indeed, if it were true, Socrates; but take care that he was not jesting. *S.* Nay, that is not Theodorus' way; and you must try to slip out of your admissions by pretending that he was not serious, or he will have to bear witness against you himself, and you may be sure no one will charge him with a false statement. Be a man, and stand to your word. *T.* Well, if you think so, I must.

*S.* Tell me then, you are learning some geometry from Theodorus, are you not? *T.* Yes. *S.* And some astronomy, too, and harmony, and calculation? *T.* I do my best to learn them, at anyrate. *S.* And so do I, my boy, from him, and from anyone else whom I suppose to know something of these matters. However, though I can manage most of them fairly well, there is one little point which puzzles me,<sup>5</sup> and I should like to discuss it with you and the others. Tell me now: does not learning mean becoming wiser about the subject one learns? *T.* Of course. *S.* And it is wisdom that makes the wise man wise? *T.* Yes. *S.* And is there any difference between that and knowledge? *T.* What?

<sup>5</sup> This is the well-known "Socratic irony," the profession of entire ignorance as a justification for a series of questions designed to elicit from the answerer the conclusion that the questioner had in his mind from the beginning. It is the motive of the dialogue form as a whole. See further note 9 on page 12.

*S.* Wisdom. Is it not the case that one is wise about a thing when one has knowledge of it? *T.* Yes, what then? *S.* It follows that knowledge and wisdom are the same? *T.* Yes. *S.* Very well then, this is what puzzles me, and I cannot make it clear to myself anyhow—I mean what  
 146 knowledge really is. Can we explain it? What do you say? Which of us shall say the first word? and the first one who makes a mistake, and the next and the next, shall sit down an ass, as the boys say when they play at ball: and the one who wins through without a blunder shall be king, and make us answer whatever he chooses. . . . Why are you silent? Theodorus, I hope my love of talking has not led me into rudeness, when I only wish to get us to converse together and be friendly and affable? *Theodorus.* Nay, there would be no rudeness in that, Socrates. But ask one of the boys to answer; I am not accustomed to discussions of this sort, and I am too old to pick up the habit; but for these boys it would be very suitable, and they will make much better progress than I should, for it is very true that youth will make progress in anything. So, as you began, keep to Theaetetus, and make him answer your questions. *Socrates.* Theaetetus, you hear what Theodorus says; and I know well you will not wish to disobey him; indeed it would be a shocking thing not to obey an older and a wiser man in such a case. So then, answer frankly and freely. What do you think knowledge is?

*Theaetetus.* Since you and Theodorus bid me, Socrates, I needs must. In any case, if I go wrong, you will set me right. *S.* Assuredly—that is, if we can. *T.* Well then, I think that the subjects Theodorus teaches are knowledges—geometry, and the others you mentioned just now; and the art of the cobbler, too, and other craftsmen—all and each seem to me to be knowledges. *S.* That is indeed a frank and even lavish answer, my friend. You were asked for a single simple thing and you have given many and multifarious. *T.* Why, what do you mean, Socrates? *S.* Something silly, maybe; but I will tell you what I have in my mind. When you speak of cobblery, you mean nothing else, I suppose, than the knowledge of the making of shoes? *T.* No. *S.* And by carpentry, again, you mean

nothing else than the knowledge of the making of wooden vessels? *T.* No. *S.* In each case, then, you define the object of the respective knowledge? *T.* Yes. *S.* But what I asked, Theaetetus, was not of what things there is knowledge, nor how many kinds of knowledge there are: it was not with the idea of counting them that we raised the question, but in order to learn what the thing itself, knowledge, is. Am I not right? *T.* Yes, quite right. *S.* Look at it in this way. If anyone were to ask us about some common everyday object, as for instance, what clay is—if we were to tell him “potters’ clay” and “stove-makers’ clay” and “brickmakers’ clay,” should we not be making ourselves ridiculous? *T.* Perhaps so. *S.* Yes, we should; first, in thinking that the questioner would understand anything from our answer, when our answer was simply “clay” with the addition of “puppet-makers’” or any other trade. . . . For do you imagine anyone understands the name of a thing when he does not know what the thing is? *T.* Certainly not. *S.* No: so if he does not know what knowledge is, he will not know what a knowledge of shoes is. *T.* No. *S.* Then if he is ignorant of knowledge, he does not understand what cobblery means or any other art. *T.* That is true. *S.* Consequently it is ridiculous for a man who is asked what knowledge is, to answer by giving the name of a particular art; for his answer simply indicates a knowledge of something, which is not what he was asked. *T.* It seems so. *S.* Yes; and then again, he goes an immense way round when he might quite well have answered easily and shortly; just as in the case of mud it is—do you not think?—quite easy and simple to say that clay is earth mixed with moisture, putting aside the question, whose clay it is, altogether.

*T.* I can see now that it is a simple matter, if you take it in this way, Socrates. But it seems to me that you are putting the same sort of question as occurred to your namesake Socrates here and myself when we were talking a little while ago. *S.* And what was that? *T.* Theodorus here had been demonstrating to us about surds, and proving that the square roots of 3 and 5 had no common measure with that of 1; and so on, taking each in



turn, up to 17; and there, I think, he stopped. Now it occurred to us that, as the surds seemed unlimited in number, we might try to frame a description which would include them all. *S.* And did you discover one? *T.* I believe so. See what you think. *S.* Tell me. *T.* We divided all numbers into two divisions. Those of which equal factors could be found we compared in form to a square, and called quadrangular and equilateral numbers. *S.* Well done indeed! *T.* Then the intervening numbers, including 3 and 5 and every one that cannot be shown  
 148 as the product of equal factors, but as either a greater number multiplied into a smaller, or a smaller into a greater, and are consequently contained by unequal sides, we compared to an oblong, and called them oblong numbers. *S.* Excellent! And then? *T.* The lines that compose the sides of an equilateral plane number we defined as lengths, and those that compose an oblong number we called powers, as having no common measure with the others in length, but only in the plane figures that they have the power to form.<sup>6</sup> And the same with solids. *S.* Superlative, boys! Theodorus seems to me to be in no danger of a conviction for false witness. *T.* I must say, Socrates, that I could not answer your question about knowledge as we did that about lengths and powers. And yet I imagine that is the kind of answer you want; so that Theodorus is convicted of falsehood after all. *S.* How now? Sup-

<sup>6</sup> The Greek science of numbers "was closely connected with geometry . . . and borrowed from the latter science its symbolism and nomenclature" (Gow, *History of Greek Mathematics*, 1884, p. 72). "In numbers the Greeks had no symbolism at all for *surds*. They knew that surds existed, that there was no exact numerical equivalent, for instance, for the root of 2: but they knew also that the diagonal of a square: side::  $\sqrt{2}$ : 1. Hence lines, which were merely convenient symbols for other numbers, became the *indispensable* symbols for surds. . . . It is not, therefore, surprising that a linear symbolism became habitual to the Greek mathematicians, and that their attention was wholly diverted from the customary arithmetical signs of the unlearned" (*Ibid.* pp. 73-74). The word for "surd" is literally "power": it was generally used to mean a square, not a square root; but when Plato wrote the terminology was probably still unsettled.

pose someone had said that he had never met a boy who could run as fast as you, and then you ran a race and were beaten by a runner of the first class in the prime of life; would that make what he said any the less true, do you think? *T.* No. *S.* Well, do you suppose that knowledge is really, as I called it just now, a little thing to discover, and not a task for the cleverest men? *T.* I do indeed—the very cleverest. *S.* Pluck up your courage then, and believe that Theodorus was not speaking without good reason: and do your very best to get clear ideas of things, and of the nature of knowledge in particular.

*T.* If willingness is all that is wanted, Socrates, the riddle shall be answered. *S.* Come then—you showed us the road excellently just now—take the way you dealt with the numbers as your model, and just as you classed them in one species, try now to give the many kinds of knowledge a single definition, too. *T.* To tell the truth, Socrates, I have often set myself to think about it, as I had been told the questions you ask; but I have never been able to persuade myself that I had come to any sound conclusions about it, nor have I found anyone else who could answer the question for me in the way you require: and yet I cannot stop trying. *S.* Aha! you are in travail, my dear Theaetetus. It is pregnancy that is the matter with you. *T.* I do not know, Socrates. I only tell you how I feel about it. *S.* What! will you have the face to tell me you 149 have never heard that I am the son of an excellent and lusty midwife, Phaenarete? *T.* Yes, I have heard that. *S.* And have you heard, too, that I practise the same profession myself? *T.* No indeed. *S.* Well, you must know that I certainly do. But do not tell it of me to others; for it has not been discovered that I have the art, my friend, and people, not knowing it, only say that I am a most curious person and go about puzzling men. You have heard that, perhaps? *T.* Yes, I have. *S.* Shall I tell you the reason, then? *T.* By all means.

*S.* You must call to mind the whole principle of midwifery; and you will understand better what I mean. I suppose you know that no one practises as a midwife who can still conceive and bear children, but only those who



are past child-bearing. *T.* Certainly. *S.* Now they say that this goes back to Artemis, because she, a childless goddess, is the patroness of childbirth. Therefore she gave the art, not indeed to the barren, because human nature is too weak to deal aright with things of which it has no experience, but to those who can no longer bear through age, honouring in them the likeness to herself. *T.* That seems likely. *S.* And is not this likely, too, or rather certain:—that midwives can tell better than others whether women are pregnant or not? *T.* Assuredly. *S.* Furthermore they are able, by means of drugs and charms, to bring on the pains of labour and to deaden them at their will; yes, and to make those whose labour is hard bring forth; and if they think it best that the child should miscarry, they make it miscarry. *T.* That is so.

*S.* Well then, have you noticed this, too, about them, that they are in addition the cleverest of matchmakers, being complete adepts at knowing what woman will bear the best children to what man? *T.* I am not sure that I have heard that. *S.* Well, let me tell you that they pride themselves even more on this than on their actual midwifery. For consider a moment—is it the same art or two different arts, do you think, that deal with the culture and harvesting of crops, and with the selection of the best land for planting and sowing a particular sort? *T.* One and the same, certainly. *S.* And do you think, my friend, that the corresponding arts in the case of a woman will be different?

150 *T.* No, probably not. *S.* No indeed. But there is an immoral and unscientific method of bringing a man and a woman together which we know as procuring, and the existence of this makes the midwives, who are very self-respecting people, loth to act as matchmakers, for fear it may lead to the worse charge; though all the same it is, you will admit, only the true midwife that can be expected to make proper matches. *T.* So it appears.

*S.* These then are their functions; and very important ones they are, but not so important as mine. For in the case of women there is not the further difficulty that the offspring is sometimes genuine and sometimes spurious, and that it is hard to distinguish between them. Were it so, it would be

their crowning achievement <sup>7</sup> to decide which was true and which false—do you not think so? *T.* I do. *S.* Now my method of midwifery is like theirs in most respects, but differs in that I apply it to men and not to women, and that it is their souls I treat and not their bodies. But my greatest feat is that I am able to test in every kind of way whether the offspring of a young man's intellect is an imposture and a lie, or something genuine and true. In one point I and the midwives are in the same position: I am sterile of wisdom, and the reproach that has often been made against me, that I ask questions of others, but never answer any by any chance myself, because I have nothing wise to say, is a true reproach. And the cause of it is this: it is divinely ordained that I should help others to bring forth, but bring forth nothing myself. I am, then, myself no such prodigy of wisdom nor can I point to any great invention, born of my soul; but those who pass their time with me, though at first they seem, some of them, quite unintelligent, nevertheless in my company all, as time goes on, all to whom heaven is kind, progress amazingly—or so it seems to them and to others. And all the while it is clear that they have never learnt anything from me, but have discovered for themselves in their own minds treasures manifold for their possession. Of this birth I under heaven am the cause. And this one can plainly see; for many ere now, who did not know it, thinking themselves the cause and holding me of slight account, have left me, either of their own motion or on the advice of friends, before their time; whereafter the rest of their ideas miscarried through evil associations, and those I had helped them to bring forth they reared badly and lost; for they cared less for truth than for lies and phantoms; and at the last they were seen by others and by themselves, too, to be unlearned fools. One of them was Aristides, the son of Lysimachus; and there are many others. And 151 when they come back to me, wanting my company, and begging me to take them, some of them the voice I hear within me forbids me to receive, but some it allows, and once again the good that is in them grows unbidden.

<sup>7</sup> Jowett.

Now those who spend their time with me are like women in travail in this way, too: they suffer pangs, and are plagued and perplexed day and night, and that far worse than women; and these pangs my art has power to excite and to allay. So much for them. But there are some whom I find not to be pregnant yet, and in no need of my skill; and for these, with the best will in the world, I seek out suitable matches, and, if I may say so, I divine fairly correctly whose intercourse will do them good. Many of them I have put out to Prodicus,<sup>8</sup> and many to other giants of wisdom.

Now I have told you this long story, my friend, because I suspect that (as you think yourself) you are in travail with something that you have conceived in your mind. Approach me then, a midwife's son and myself skilled in midwifery, and try hard to answer my questions as you best can. But if, when I examine anything you say, I come to the conclusion that it is an imposture and false and therefore take it from you and cast it away, you must not rage like a mother over her first-born. My good friend, there have been many who are so angry with me when I rob them of some foolish notion of their own that they are positively ready to bite me; and they never think I do it in kindness, for they cannot understand that "no god bears ill will to mortals," and nothing I do is done through ill will, but because it is not permitted to me to accept a lie or cover up the truth. Begin again, then, Theaetetus, and try to tell me what knowledge is. Never say that you cannot, for if heaven wills, and gives you heart, you can.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For Prodicus, see Dr Jackson's article on the *Sophists* in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>9</sup> It is hardly necessary to point out the grace and ease of this prelude, the lightness of the conversational tone, and the almost tantalising way in which digression follows digression before the opening of the actual discussion is reached; all this, too, so contrived (as has been shown in the *Introduction*) to fill exactly a preconceived period of time.

The passage on "midwifery" is the classical account of the Socratic method. Socrates' life purpose was to induce the Athenians to clear up their ideas for themselves, so as to live in

## I

## SENSE PERCEPTION

## § 1

*T.* With such encouragement, Socrates, it would be shameful not to do one's very best to say what one can. It seems to me, then, that a man who knows anything perceives what he knows, and, as far as I can see at present, knowledge is nothing but perception. *S.* Excellent. A spirited answer, boy. That is the way to deliver oneself of an opinion. But now let us examine it, and see if it is genuine, or an egg with nothing in it. Perception, you say, is knowledge? *T.* Yes. *S.* Now it seems to me that you have stated a proposition about knowledge that is of no little importance; one, too, which Protagoras used to 152

all things with a conscious end before them to which their actions should conform. Morality he conceived to a great extent as efficiency, the conscious adaptation of oneself to one's environment, the consistent pursuit of a clearly-defined purpose. It was his habit to use the ordinary arts and crafts as examples of such conscious consistency; and he would argue that in education, for instance, or in political life, one ought to have as clear a conception of one's end and the means to attain it as in horse-training or the management of a household. His invariable method was to reveal his companions' inconsistencies to themselves by a subtle but apparently simple course of cross-examination. He held that everyone should be able "to give and receive an account" of the various notions—justice, piety, good citizenship, and the rest—by which his own conduct and his judgments of others were presumably guided. When a man declared that he had decided on such and such a course of action because he thought it right, Socrates explained that he had never been able himself to make out what was really meant by the word "right," and would be glad to know how it ought to be understood; whereupon, by a series of questions, he would demonstrate that, as a matter of fact, the man himself had no clear notion of what he meant, and sent him away delivered of some at any rate of the inconsistencies which took the place of guiding principles in his life.

maintain. But he has put the same idea in another way. He says if I remember, that "a man is the measure of all things; of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not."<sup>10</sup> You have read him, I suppose? *T.* Yes, and more than once. *S.* Well, is not his view something like this—that as particular things appear to me, so they are to me; and as they appear to you, so they are to you—meaning by "a man" you and me? *T.* Yes, that is what he says. *S.* Now it is not likely that a wise man would talk nonsense, so let us follow out his idea. Is it not the case that the same wind makes one of us shiver and another not, and one shiver slightly and another very much? *T.* Assuredly. *S.* Are we then to say that the wind in itself is cold, or not cold? Or shall we follow Protagoras and say that it is cold to the man who shivers, and not cold to the man who does not? *T.* That seems reasonable. *S.* And it appears so to each? *T.* Yes. *S.* And by appearing we mean perception? *T.* We do. *S.* Appearance then and perception is one and the same thing in the case of heat and all such things. For as each man perceives them, so, one would imagine, they really are for him. *T.* So it seems. *S.* Perception then is always of reality, and as not admitting of falsity, is knowledge? *T.* Apparently.

*S.* Now, in the name of the Graces, was Protagoras a prodigy of wisdom who merely hinted his doctrine in this obscure form to the rest of us, the general rabble, but told the real "Truth" to his disciples in secret? <sup>11</sup> *T.*

<sup>10</sup> On Protagoras see Zeller's *Pre-Socratic Philosophy*, vol. ii. (English translation by Alleyne, 1881); Dr Jackson's article quoted above; and more especially A. W. Benn, *The Greek Philosophers*, vol. i. pp. 86-89, and elsewhere. — Of the text of his treatise entitled *Truth* practically nothing is known except what can be gleaned from the Theaetetus, but his doctrine that "Man is the measure of all things" was famous. How much of the argument that Plato ascribes to him was really his own it is impossible to say. Some modern investigators attribute most of the physical theory on which his doctrine of relativity is here based to Aristippus, the founder of the Socratic school known as the Cyrenaics; but, no doubt, Protagoras himself would have supported his views by some sort of analysis of sensible experience.

<sup>11</sup> This is a plain hint that much if not all of what follows



What do you mean by that, Socrates? *S.* I will tell you; and it is no common doctrine by any means. It is, that there is nothing that has an absolute, independent being, and nothing to which you can rightly ascribe any sort of quality;<sup>12</sup> for if you speak of it as great, it will turn out just as much to be small; and if heavy, light; and so with all things; for there is nothing that is self-subsistent or independent or has any real quality: it is out of motion, movement and interfusion that everything comes to be,—“is” we say, but incorrectly, for nothing ever is, but is always in a process of becoming. And on this point the whole series of philosophers except Parmenides may be taken as agreeing, Protagoras and Heraclitus and Empedocles, and of the poets the leaders of either branch, Epicharmus of comedy and Homer of tragedy—Homer, who said “Ocean, begetter of gods, and Tethys their mother,” which means that everything was born of flux and motion;—do you not think he meant that? *T.* I do.

*S.* How then can one make a stand against an army like that, with Homer in command, and not make oneself ridiculous? *T.* It is not easy, Socrates. *S.* It is not indeed, Theaetetus. Besides, there is sufficient evidence for the doctrine in the fact that all so-called being and becoming are produced by motion, and not-being and ceasing-to-be by rest: for heat and fire, the origin and governing principle of all else, are themselves born from movement and friction. Am I not right in saying that these are the sources of fire? *T.* Assuredly they are. *S.* And further all living things have the same origin. *T.* No doubt. *S.* Nay, more; does not the condition of the body deteriorate as the result of rest and idleness, while gymnastic exercises—movements, that is—mostly preserve it? *T.* Yes. *S.* And the condition of one’s mind—is not that preserved and improved through the acquisition of knowledge by learning and practice, which are motions; and does not rest, that is, the failure to learn

is not really the theory of Protagoras. He spoke of “being”: what if he really meant “becoming”?

<sup>12</sup> The Greek does not contain the abstract word “quality,” which is introduced at 182*a* as a novelty.

and practise, result in ignorance and forgetfulness? *T.* Very much so. *S.* The one, then, movement, is good both in body and soul, and the other, rest, is bad. *T.* So it seems. *S.* And let me remind you of calms and still weather, that here too rest induces decay and destruction, but movement the opposite. To all which I add as the final and conclusive argument, that by his "rope of gold" Homer means nothing else than the sun; and what he wishes us to understand is, that as long as the motion of the sun and the heavenly sphere goes on, the world of gods and men exists and continues; but if it were to stand still as if chained, everything would go to ruin and the whole universe be, so to say, topsy-turvy.<sup>13</sup> *T.* Yes, Socrates, I think he must mean what you say.

*S.* Now you must look at it, my good friend, in this way: take sight first—what you call a white colour is not to be understood as something outside your eyes, nor yet as in your eyes: it has no place of its own; for if it had it would evidently be in a definite position, and stand still, and not be an incident in the process of becoming. *T.* Then how is it? *S.* Let us keep before us the principle with which we started and allow nothing to exist absolutely, as a single self-subsistent reality: in this way we shall see that black, white and any other colour is produced by the eye coming into contact with the appropriate motion, and that what we  
 154 affirm to be colour in any given case is neither the agent nor the object, but an occurrence between the two peculiar to each percipient;—for I suppose you would hardly maintain that each colour is seen by a dog or any other animal as it is seen by you? *T.* I should think not, indeed. *S.* Nay, more—does anything appear alike to you and any

<sup>13</sup> The "golden rope" is taken from Homer, *Iliad*, viii. 18 *et seq.*, where Zeus tells the gods that if they fastened him with a golden rope, and all, gods and goddesses alike, hung on to it, they could not drag him from heaven! This ridiculous example is a skit on the fantastic interpretation of mythology which appears to have been a property of the Heraclitean school. It comes as the climax of a *crescendo* of absurdities, and makes the whole passage a small masterpiece of parody. Observe the opening solemnity of the last sentence and the abrupt bathos of the end.



other man? So far from that, would you not maintain that it never appears the same twice even to yourself, because you yourself are never the same twice? *T.* That seems to me more probable. *S.* Now you will see that if the bigness, whiteness or hotness were in the object we measured or touched, the mere approach of something else would never have altered it, without a change in itself; and in the same way if the quality were in the subject measuring or touching, the fact that something else approached or was affected in some way would never have altered it unless it were itself affected. For on the common-sense theory <sup>14</sup> one can easily be driven into saying the most absurd things—or so Protagoras would hold, and all who make his views their own. *T.* How? What absurd things?

*S.* A little example will tell you all I mean. If you put four dice beside six, we say that the six are more, in fact half as many again; but if you put twelve beside them, they are fewer, in fact half. And it is not in nature to say anything else, is it? *T.* Certainly not. *S.* Well, suppose that Protagoras or another asks you—"Theaetetus, can anything become greater or more numerous except by being increased?"—what will you say? *T.* If I answer the present question candidly, I shall say "no"; but if I am to avoid contradicting my previous answer, I shall say "yes." *S.* Excellent, by Hera! A truly admirable answer, my friend. It seems that if you say "yes," the situation will be quite Euripidean—"my tongue" unchallenged, "but my thoughts" confuted! <sup>15</sup> *T.* True. *S.* Now if you and I were terrible adepts who had explored the whole contents of the mind, we should spend the rest of our time in thrusting at each other out of the abundance of our resources and countering argument with argument in a sort of sophistic duel. But as it is, being mere laymen, our first desire will be to try if we can make out what we really think about it, and see whether our ideas are consistent with each other or not. *T.* That is certainly what I wish.

*S.* And I, too. And that being so, as we have all

<sup>14</sup> Literally "now," "as it is."

<sup>15</sup> A reference to the well-known line in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (v. 612), "My tongue has sworn it, but my mind is unsworn."

155 our time before us, let us, quietly and in all good feeling, put ourselves honestly to the test, and start again by inquiring what these questionable shapes that haunt our minds really are.<sup>16</sup> The first, on consideration, we shall put, I think, in this way:—nothing ever becomes either greater or less, in bulk or in number, as long as it is equal to itself: is it not so? *T.* Yes. *S.* And the second:—that to which nothing is added, and from which nothing is taken away, neither increases nor decreases, but remains equal to itself? *T.* Most assuredly. *S.* And the third:—what at one time was not, and subsequently is, can only come to be by a process of becoming? *T.* So one would suppose. *S.* These, it seems to me, are three principles that fall foul of each other in our minds when we state the problem about the dice, or when we say that I at my age without growing either taller or smaller myself, in the course of a year am at first taller than a young man like you and then smaller, not by losing some of my own height, but because you have grown. For evidently I am in the end what I was not at first, and yet without having come to be so; since one cannot come to be anything without becoming, and I could not become less without losing some of my height. And there are other puzzles of the same sort past all counting—that is if we are content to take these as they stand. You follow me in all this, I suppose, Theaetetus? You certainly seem to me to know something about such questions. *T.* Yes, Socrates, and in very truth I am terribly puzzled to know what they mean, and sometimes when I look at them they make me positively dizzy. *S.* I can understand it,

<sup>16</sup> The following paradoxes (which are not explained in the sequel) would have been evaded in such a work, for instance, as the *Phaedo*, by a laborious statement to the effect that one thing was greater than another by reason of the “presence” in it of the Idea of greatness as against the presence of the Idea of smallness in the other—which is evidently no explanation at all. Dr Jackson has pointed out that in the later dialogues these “paradoxes of relation” are not felt as difficulties at all. It is seen that the comparisons which the mind institutes between objects are its own work, that—as we shall see in § 9—relation is one of the categories, a form under which things are thought, and not something inherent in themselves.

my friend : and it seems to me that Theodorus made a very good guess at your nature. For this wonder is a true philosopher's feeling : indeed it is the sole origin of all philosophy, and the poet who made Iris the child of Thaummas was no mean genealogist.<sup>17</sup> But do you see now how these things are accounted for on Protagoras' theory, as we interpret it ? *T.* Not quite, I think. *S.* Then will you be grateful to me if I help you to search out the secret "truth" concealed in the thought of a famous sage—or rather, sages ? *T.* I shall indeed be very grateful.

## § 2

*S.* Look all round then and make sure that none of the uninitiated is listening to us. I mean the men who think that nothing exists but what they can clutch in their hands, and refuse to accept reactions, processes or anything invisible as realities at all. *T.* These must indeed be a hard and obstinate set of people, Socrates. *S.* Yes, boy, 156 for they are the merest boors : but there are others much more cultured<sup>18</sup> whose mysteries I will proceed to expound. Their first principle, on which indeed all that I was saying just now depends, is this : everything is originally motion, and nothing else, and of this motion there are two kinds, each presenting innumerable varieties, but both having the property, in the one case, of acting, and in the other, of

<sup>17</sup> The genealogist is Hesiod. Why Iris represents philosophy is not clear—probably it is connected with her function as the messenger of the gods. The name Thaummas implies wonder.

<sup>18</sup> Who these "more cultured" theorists are is not known. Since Schleiermacher it has generally been taken for granted that they were the Cyrenaics, but Dr Jackson (*J. of Phil.*, xiii. pp. 255-256 and 268-270) denies that there is any evidence of their having taken the step which Plato takes here, and resolved the "active and passive elements" of the world of appearance into mere potentialities of sensation. He himself thinks that Plato is expressing his own views ; and this may be accepted, in this sense, that Plato is to be taken as expounding what in his opinion the world of appearance must be supposed to be, if one could abstract from it all form—all that is absolute and universal—and leave only the bare facts of sense.—But the complete analysis (and consequent refutation) is not given till we reach § 8.

being acted upon. From the mutual contact and interaction of these, there is born an infinitely various offspring of two closely-related types ; the one, object of sensation ; the other, sensation, which is always generated in simultaneous union with its object. To the sensations we give such names as seeing, hearing, smell, cold, heat, and further, pleasures, pains, desires, fears, and others—very many with special names, and countless numbers unnamed : and to each of these corresponds a cognate variety of the object class—to all kinds of sensation of sight, all kinds of colours ; to sensations of hearing, in like manner, all kinds of sounds ; and to the other sensations other objects that come into existence with them in each case. Now how does this tale bear on what has gone before, Theaetetus ? Do you see ? *T.* Not quite, Socrates.

*S.* Well, let us see if we can get to the end of it. The meaning is that all these things are, as I say, in motion, and their motion is fast or slow. Those which are slow have their movements confined to a single spot and are related only to what is near them, and so generate ; but the emanations from them are consequently more rapid, for the motion of these is a forward motion.<sup>19</sup> When, then, an eye meets some corresponding object that has come within range, and the conjunction produces whiteness and the cognate sensation (products which would never result from the conjunction of either with some other thing), then there travels between them, from the side of the eye, sight, and from the side of the object which combines to generate the colour, whiteness ; and the eye on the one hand is filled with sight and sees, and becomes not indeed sight,<sup>20</sup> but a seeing eye, and the

<sup>19</sup> The world is conceived as a congeries of moving things (though, strictly speaking, they are not things at all but mere impalpable centres of force), the motion of which gives rise to a series of secondary motions, which pass from one to the other, and are in one aspect sensation, in another, object of sensation. It is shown later on that on this basis no object can be said to exist except in relation to a subject, and no subject except in relation to an object.

<sup>20</sup> That is, there is no such thing as sensation in the abstract, or quality in the abstract ; only particular acts of sense and particular objects of sense.

combining object in its turn is filled with whiteness, and becomes (as before) not whiteness, but a white object—a white piece of wood or a stone or whatever it is that happens to have its outline coloured so. And all other qualities, heat, hardness, and everything else, are to be understood in the same way: namely, that, as we said just now, nothing exists absolutely, but everything of every kind 157 originates from motion in a process of mutual interaction; for to conceive that either the active element or the passive exists, singly, as an independent thing, is, say these theorists, a total impossibility. The active element is nothing until it comes in contact with the passive, and the passive nothing until it comes in contact with the active; and that which in one conjunction is active in another assumes a passive character. From all of which results, as I was saying just now, that nothing exists as a single independent thing, but everything is always in a process of becoming relatively to something else, and the word “being” ought to be utterly abolished—not but that we have ourselves been forced to use it many times, even just now, through habit and ignorance; whereas, according to these philosophers, we ought to do nothing of the kind; we ought moreover to set our faces against “anything,” “anything’s,” “mine,” “this,” “that,” and any other word that makes a thing stand still, and speak only of things as becoming, being generated, perishing, altering, as they are in nature; for the man who uses words that represent things as standing still is easily confuted. And as we speak about them in detail so we must speak about them when massed in the groups which we call man, stone, or any animal or form. Does this fare tempt you, Theaetetus? Do you find it to your taste?

*T.* I am sure I do not know, Socrates; and for that matter I cannot tell either whether you are saying what you think yourself, or making an experiment on me.  
*S.* My friend, you forget that I disclaim all knowledge and responsibility in these matters—that I bring forth none of them myself, but merely play the midwife to you, and to that end I make my incantations and measure out doses of all the philosophers until such time as I bring the off-



spring of your mind to the light of day ; and only when it is born will it be my business to examine it and see whether it will turn out to be an empty egg or a true birth. So—take your courage in both hands, and answer me like a man what you really think. *T.* Ask what you will. *S.* Tell me, then, once more : do you accept the doctrine that nothing is, but all is becoming—and the rest of the statement ? *T.* I must say that when I hear you expounding it as you have done, it seems to me to be wonderfully reasonable, and that one must suppose things to be as you say.

*S.* Well, we must not pass over the rest of the theory—the part that deals with dreams and morbid states, especially delusions of hearing, sight and other senses. You know, I imagine, that in all these cases the doctrine we have been describing appears to be disproved beyond all question ; for here at least, it is said, if nowhere else, 158 our sensations must be false, and so far from a man's perceptions being real to him, nothing that he perceives is real at all. *T.* Quite true, Socrates. *S.* Then what argument can possibly be left, boy, to the man who contends that perception is knowledge, and that what appears to anyone is real to the percipient ? *T.* Socrates, I am afraid to say that I do not know, because you scolded me just now when I said it. But really I could never dispute the fact that men who are mad or dreaming have false opinions, when some of them think they are gods, and others birds, and imagine in their sleep that they are flying. *S.* Well, do you know the question that is sometimes debated about these cases, especially about waking and sleeping ? *T.* What is that ? *S.* I feel sure you must often have heard people asking how could one prove—if it were put to you at this very moment—whether we are asleep and dreaming all our thoughts, or awake and talking in the real world ? *T.* I must say, Socrates, it is hard to see how one could prove it ; for either way the results are, so to say, parallel. There is nothing to prevent our dreaming that we are talking as we have been : and when one dreams that one is repeating one's dreams the similarity is most singular. *S.* You see then, that it is quite possible

to debate the question whether one is asleep or awake ; and moreover, since the periods of our sleeping and waking are equal, in each of them the mind struggles to affirm that what appears to it at the moment is the true reality ; so that for half the time we say this is real, and for half that, and are equally positive about both ? *T.* Certainly. *S.* And does not the same argument hold good about morbid states and insanity, except as regards the equality of the time ? *T.* True. *S.* What then ? Shall truth be defined merely by the length or shortness of time ? *T.* No, that would be absurd in many ways. *S.* But what else can you advance to prove clearly which of the two opinions is true ? *T.* I cannot think of anything.

*S.* Well, listen while I tell you what would be said about it by those who hold that every appearance is, at the time, real for the percipient. They would ask, I think, some such question as this:—Theaetetus, if one thing is wholly different from another, can it have the same property in any way ?—and by different is not meant sameness in some respects and difference in others, but entire difference. *T.* It is clearly impossible that there could be the same property, or anything else the same, where there is absolute difference. *S.* And must we not also agree that the thing is unlike ? *T.* I think so. *S.* If, then, one thing becomes like or unlike another thing—whether itself, or something else—we must say that it is becoming in the one case the same, in the other entirely different ? <sup>21</sup> *T.* Necessarily. *S.* Now were we not saying just now that the active elements were many, indeed innumerable, and so also the passive ? *T.* Yes. *S.* And further that one thing coming into relation first with one thing and then with another produced different results ? *T.* Certainly. *S.* Well, let us take myself or yourself and objects in general on the same principle—say Socrates well and Socrates ill. Is the one like the other or unlike ? *T.* Do you mean Socrates ill, as a whole, like Socrates well, as a whole ? *S.* A very good

<sup>21</sup> A transparent fallacy: all difference is unlikeness; therefore all unlikeness is difference. The object is simply to emphasise the absurdity of making every sensation unique and incomparable.



question ; that is exactly what I mean. *T.* Unlike presumably. *S.* And consequently different also ? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* And you will say the same with regard to his being asleep, and the other conditions we enumerated just now ? *T.* Yes. *S.* Then everything of a nature to act on something else, when it acts on Socrates ill, will find in me a different subject for its operation from Socrates well ? *T.* No doubt. *S.* And on each occasion I, the patient, and it, the agent, will combine to produce different results ? *T.* Yes ; what then ? *S.* If I drink wine when I am well, it appears to me pleasant and sweet ? *T.* Yes. *S.* The fact being that, on our supposition, the agent and the patient combined to produce sweetness and sensation, both simultaneously in motion ; and the sensation, on the part of the percipient, makes the tongue perceive, while the sweetness, on the part of the wine, pervades it and causes it to be and appear sweet to the healthy tongue. *T.* That is certainly what we originally accepted. *S.* But when it acts on me in ill-health, in the first place it is really acting, is it not, on a different subject, since I am altered ? *T.* Yes. *S.* And it follows that the draught of wine in combination with Socrates in this condition produces different results, namely, in the tongue a sensation of bitterness, and in the wine a bitterness that comes in being and moves about it—and the wine becomes not bitterness, but a bitter thing ; and I not perception, but a person perceiving ? *T.* Most certainly. *S.* Moreover, it will never happen that I perceive anything else in the same way : for another object means another  
160 perception, and makes the percipient different—in fact another person ; nor will the agent that acts on me ever act on any other patient and produce the same result and so have the same quality. *T.* That is so. *S.* No, nor shall I ever be the same to myself again, or the object the same to itself. *T.* No.

*S.* And yet it is surely necessary that when I become percipient it should be in relation to something : for one cannot be percipient, yet percipient of nothing ; and in the same way it must be in relation to someone that the object becomes bitter or sweet or something of the kind : for to be

sweet, but sweet to no one is impossible. *T.* Quite true. *S.* Then it remains, I imagine, for us to be—if “be” is the word, or if “become,” to become—in relation to each other; since destiny connects our existence closely with something, but that something is not anything else, nor is it our respective selves. Evidently it can only be that we are connected with each other.<sup>22</sup> So whether one speaks of a thing as being or as becoming, he must say that it is, or becomes for, or of, or in relation to something else; he must neither say, nor allow anyone else to say that anything is or becomes by itself—according to the theory we have been expounding. *T.* Certainly. *S.* Since, then, the object acting on me exists in relation to me and not to another, I perceive it and no one else. *T.* Of course. *S.* My sensation, then, is true to me: for it is at any given time a part of my existence: and thus, as Protagoras says, I alone can judge of the things that are for me, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not. *T.* So it seems. *S.* It surely follows, then, that being a true witness and incapable of error regarding what is or becomes, I must be in the position of knowing what I perceive? *T.* It must be so. *S.* Thus your proposition that knowledge is nothing more or less than perception turns out to be an admirable one; and we have found a complete coincidence between the doctrines of Homer, Heraclitus, and all their tribe, that everything is in motion like a stream—of Protagoras the all-wise, that man is a measure of all things—and of Theaetetus, that, this being so, perception becomes knowledge. Is it not so, Theaetetus? Are we to say that this is, as it were, your first-born, brought into the world by my aid? What do you say? *T.* I can only agree, Socrates.

*S.* Of this then it seems, with much labour, we have at last

<sup>22</sup> This is the last step in the analysis. Sensation is a relation, granted; but if that is the whole account of the matter, if the whole of our experience is merely a series of disconnected sensations, if the world is nothing but a “permanent possibility of sensation” in Mill’s phrase, and the subject nothing but a permanent possibility of perception, then neither subject nor object have any existence except in relation to each other; and as that relation is never twice the same, the whole world is reduced to “the baseless fabric of a vision.”

161 been delivered, whatever it may turn out to be. And after the birth we must proceed in due form to run it very literally round a circle of argument,<sup>23</sup> and make sure that it is worth rearing, and not an empty egg and a falsehood. Or, since it is yours, do you think we ought to rear it at any cost, and not discard it? Or will you bear to see it tested, and not be angry if your first-born is taken from you? *Theodorus*. Theaetetus will bear it patiently, Socrates; for he is not irritable. But tell me, in the name of goodness, is it not as you say after all? *Socrates*. Ah, you are a true lover of discussion, Theodorus, and ingenuous<sup>24</sup> enough to think I am a sort of portmanteau of arguments and that all I have to do is to pick one out and prove that we were wrong! You do not see that in reality none of the arguments come from me, but all from the man who is talking with me; and as for my own small intelligence it is just enough to enable me to follow the argument of someone wiser than myself, and accept it reasonably. And so on the present occasion I shall try to do with Theaetetus here, and not to say anything on my own account. *T*. No doubt you are right, Socrates; do as you say.

## § 3

*S*. Do you know then, Theodorus, what astonishes me in your friend Protagoras? <sup>25</sup> *T*. What? *S*. The rest of his theory, that what appears to each man is real to him, pleases me mightily: but I have always wondered why

<sup>23</sup> This alludes to an ancient Athenian rite in which a child, a few days after birth, was carried at a run several times round the ancestral hearth.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell.

<sup>25</sup> With this delightful sally the second movement of the dialogue begins. It will be seen that the whole of this and the succeeding two sections are written in a spirit of irresistible playfulness. It is the *Scherzo* of the symphony, beginning with the "dog-headed ape," and ending with the picture of Protagoras thrusting up his head from the underworld, delivering a volley of argument, and scuttling away below. The reasoning throughout is quite simple, and only half serious.

he did not begin his " Truth " by saying that the measure of all things is a pig or a dog-headed ape, or some still more curious creature of those that have senses, so that he might have started his address with a finely contemptuous flourish, making it clear to us that while we were revering him for his wisdom, as if he were a god, all the while he really had no more intelligence than a tadpole, to say nothing of other men. For what are we to suppose, Theodorus ? If everything anyone perceives by his senses is to be true for him, and no one can judge anyone else's impressions better than he can himself, or has any better authority to inquire whether his opinions are true or false—if, in short, as we have repeatedly said, everyone is to form his own opinions about his own impressions, and these are invariably right and true—then why in the world, my friend, was Protagoras so wise a man that it was natural and proper for him to give lectures and charge high prices for them, and why had we, the uninstructed masses, to go and listen to him, when each of us was a measure to himself of his own wisdom ? How can we help supposing that Protagoras was merely talking to catch people's fancy ?—While as for myself and my poor art of midwifery, I will not say how ridiculous we become ; indeed I think the same may be said of the whole art of discussion ; for to examine and question one another's impressions and opinions, when each man's must necessarily be right, is a mere huge and tedious 162  
futility—that is, if there is any truth in the " Truth " of Protagoras and it was not simply a jest that he uttered from the shrine of that oracular work ?

*T.* The man was my friend, Socrates, as you yourself said. I could not have Protagoras refuted by any admissions of mine ; nor yet should I like to contradict you against my real convictions. So please take Theaetetus in hand again : I am sure he seemed a most adaptable listener just now. *S.* If you went to Sparta, Theodorus, to the wrestling-schools, and saw others stripped—some of them not very fine men either—pray, would you think it right to refuse to strip in your turn and show how you were made ? *T.* Why, what else do you suppose ?—provided they would accept my excuses ; and I hope to persuade you, too, to let

me sit and watch, and not drag my stiff body into the arena, when you can have a younger and more supple antagonist. *S.* If that pleases you it shall not displease me, Theodorus, as the proverb has it. We must return then to the wise Theaetetus.—Tell me first, Theaetetus—you heard what we were saying—are not you also surprised at suddenly finding yourself the equal in wisdom of anyone, man or god?—for I suppose you take the Protagorean measure as meant to apply to gods no less than to men? *Theaetetus.* I do; and I answer that I am indeed very surprised. For when you were explaining the theory that what appears to anyone is real to him, I thought it sounded very plausible: but now the tables have been suddenly turned.

*Socrates.* That is because you are young, my dear boy, and consequently listen with all your ears to mere rhetoric, and are easily led away. For Protagoras, or some one on his behalf, will say to all this:—"My good people, old and young, you sit there together declaiming away, and dragging in the gods, whose existence or non-existence I expressly exclude from all discussion written or spoken, and you say the sort of things that you think will appeal to the crowd—how monstrous it is that a man should be no wiser than any dumb animal!—but of proof or logic not a word; you simply argue from probabilities, whereas if Theodorus or any other geometer were to base his geometry on probabilities, he would be worth precisely nothing at all. Consider then, you and Theodorus, if you are going to accept arguments on these subjects that are nothing  
163 but appeals to probability and prejudice." *T.* Nay, neither you nor we would say that it was right, Socrates. *S.* Then you and Theodorus think that we must find some other method of inquiry? *T.* By all means.

*S.* Well, let us examine the question in this way—the question, that is, whether knowledge and sensation are the same thing or different;—for it is this, is it not, that we have had in view throughout, and which led us to raise all those curious points just now? *T.* Most assuredly. *S.* Now do we agree that whatever we see or hear we simultaneously understand? For instance, before we have learned a foreign language are we to say that we do not hear when others



peak it, or that we both hear and understand? And similarly, when we do not know the characters of a language are we to affirm that when we look at them we do not see them, or that we both see and understand? *T.* We ought to say, Socrates, that we understand just as much of them as we see or hear, in the one case the form and colour, in the other the high or low pitch; but what the grammarians and the interpreters teach about them, that we neither perceive by eye or ear nor understand.

*S.* Excellent, Theaetetus; and it would be a shame to quarrel with your argument, and check your progress. But look at this other difficulty advancing and see how we can repel it. *T.* And what is that? *S.* This. If you were asked if it is possible, when one has acquired a knowledge of a thing, that, while still remembering it and having it present in his mind, he should at the same time not know the very thing that he remembers . . . But I seem to be wasting breath, when all I want to ask is, if a man can be ignorant of something he has learnt and remembers? *T.* How could that be, Socrates? It would be a miracle. *S.* Can I be talking nonsense? Consider a moment. Do you not call seeing perceiving, and sight a sensation? *T.* I do. *S.* And have we not agreed that the man who sees anything knows it? *T.* Yes. *S.* Well, do you not recognise the existence of memory? *T.* Yes. *S.* And is memory a memory of something or of nothing? *T.* Of something. *S.* Of such things as a man has learned or perceived, is it not? *T.* Yes—and then? *S.* What a man has seen, he sometimes remembers, I believe? *T.* He does. *S.* And that, even when he shuts his eyes? Or does he forget as soon as he does that? *T.* It would be absurd to say that, Socrates. *S.* And yet we are 164 bound to say it; at least, if we are to keep to our theory. If not, good-bye to it! *T.* Ah, I begin to suspect, but I do not quite see the point; explain, please. *S.* In this way: we say that the man who sees anything, knows what he sees; for on our hypothesis sight, sensation and knowledge are identical. *T.* Certainly. *S.* And the man who sees, and knows what he sees, when he shuts his eyes, remembers it, but does



not see it. Is it so? *T.* Yes. *S.* But “does not see it” means “does not know it,” if seeing is knowing. *T.* True. *S.* The result is, then, that the man who has come to know a thing, and remembers it, does not know it, if he does not see it; which we said would be contrary to nature. *T.* Very true.

*S.* It appears then that to identify knowledge and sensation lands us in an absurdity. *T.* Apparently. *S.* So that we must declare them to be different things? *T.* I imagine so. *S.* What then, pray, can knowledge be?—for it seems that we must begin our discussion all over again. . . . But stay! What are we about, Theaetetus? *T.* How do you mean? *S.* It seems to me that we are behaving like a scurvy fighting-cock, skipping away from the theory and crowing before we have defeated it. *T.* How? *S.* Like the merest quibblers we have gone by the words alone, come to a mere verbal agreement, and proceeded complacently to celebrate our victory. We profess to be earnest inquirers, not professional disputants, and all the while, we seem unconsciously to have been doing exactly what those clever fellows do themselves. *T.* I still do not understand how you mean. *S.* I will try to explain what I have in my mind. We asked if a man who has learned something and remembers it does not know it, and then we instanced a man seeing a thing and then shutting his eyes, and argued that he remembered it without seeing it, and therefore without knowing it, which was an impossibility; and so Protagoras’ theory went by the board, and your own, too, that knowledge and sensation are identical. *T.* That seems to be so. *S.* But I have an idea that it would certainly not seem so, if the father of the first theory were alive—but that he would have had a good deal to say in its defence.<sup>26</sup> As it is we are maltreating an orphan. Even the guardians whom Protagoras left will not come to its defence—for instance, Theodorus here. So I suspect we shall have to stand up for it ourselves, for fairness’ sake. *Theodorus.* Yes, for it is not I, Socrates, but Kallias the son of Hipponicus who is the guardian of his children: I for my part

<sup>26</sup> Jowett.

somehow very soon abandoned abstract discussion for geometry. But I shall assuredly be grateful if you will come to the rescue. *Socrates*. You are right, Theodorus, and you shall see how I do it. For there are worse admissions still that one might be forced to make by not looking closely at the words one uses and the ordinary ways of affirming and denying. Shall I explain to you or to Theaetetus? *T*. Nay, to both of us; but let the younger answer, for he will be less disgraced if he is tripped up.

*S*. I propound, then, the most terrible question of all, which is, I believe, this:—can a man who knows something at the same time not know what he knows? *T*. What shall we answer, Theaetetus? *Theaetetus*. That it is impossible, I imagine. *Socrates*. No; not if you affirm seeing to be knowing. For what will you do with a question from which there is no escape—trapped in a well, as they say—when an unabashed ruffian claps his hand over one of your eyes, and asks you if you see his cloak with the covered eye? *T*. I shall say, I suppose, not with that one, but that I do with the other. *S*. Then you see and do not see the same thing at the same moment? *T*. Yes, in one way. *S*. I do not ask you to say in what way. That was not my question; but simply if, what you know, you can at the same time not know. In the present case you were shown to be seeing and not seeing at the same time; and you started by agreeing that seeing was knowing, and not seeing not knowing; I leave you to draw the inference.<sup>27</sup> *T*. Well, the inference I draw contradicts my premisses. *S*. Yes, my fine fellow; and perhaps you would have had more experiences of the kind, had anyone asked you further if it is possible to know keenly or dimly, and know things near and not things far off, and know intensely or feebly—and ten thousand other traps which one of these dialectical skirmishers at so much a day would set for you, the moment you identified knowledge and sensation, attacking hearing and smell and other such senses, and refuting you without a moment's pause until, in a stupor of wonder at his thrice-enviable ingenuity, he had you fast; whereupon he would make you his slave, bind you hand and foot, and release

<sup>27</sup> Jowett.

you in due course for a ransom to be agreed upon. But you may ask—what is it that Protagoras is going to say to reinforce his theories? Shall I tell you? *T.* By all means.

## § 4

166 *S.* Besides all that I have put forward in his defence, I imagine he will come to close quarters with us and say in high disdain—"This good fellow Socrates here frightens a mere boy by asking if one can know and not know the same thing at the same time, and gets him to say 'no,' because he cannot see what is coming, and then holds up me, of all people, to ridicule! But let me tell you the truth, Socrates, my easy-going friend: when you ask questions with a view to examining anything of mine, and the answerer is tripped up—if he says what I should have said, then I am shown to be wrong, but if he says anything else, the fault is his own. For instance, do you imagine that you will get anyone to admit that the memory a man has of something he experienced is the same sort of impression as he had before, when he was experiencing it? Far from it. Or again, that one will shrink from admitting that it is possible to know and not know the same thing at the same time; or, if that is too much for his nerves, will at anyrate allow that a man who is altered is the same man as he was before, or that a man is singular and not plural, and indeed multiplied to infinity as long as alteration continues—that is if we must really keep so close a watch on each other's verbal traps? <sup>28</sup> But come, my good fellow," he will say, "show a little more spirit. Attack what I actually said, if you can, and prove that the momentary sensations of each of us are not peculiar and incomparable; or that, though they are peculiar, it does not follow that what appears to each man becomes or—if we must say so—is real to the percipient alone. But when you talk of pigs and dog-headed apes you not only act piggishly yourself but induce your hearers to do likewise towards my theories, which is not fair. For I declare that the truth is as I have

<sup>28</sup> Campbell.

written : each of us is a measure of what is, and what is not ; but there is an infinite difference between us precisely because to one man one set of things is and appears, and to another another.<sup>29</sup> As for the wisdom of the wise, I am far from denying its existence, but the man I call wise is just that man and no other who is able, when something appears to be, and is, bad to someone, to make it appear, and be, good to him instead. Now you must not misuse my words to attack my meaning : I will explain it to you more clearly in a moment. Remember that, as was said before, to a sick man his food appears and is bitter, but to a healthy man it is and appears the opposite : however, you must not call either of them wiser than the other ; that is an impossibility ; nor must you describe the sick man as ignorant for thinking as he does, and the healthy man wise for thinking differently ; you must convert the sick man to the other view ; for the other state of mind is better. And so too in education the subject must be altered from one state of mind to a better, but while a doctor effects the conversion by drugs, the sophist does it by words. For it is not the case that a man who has false notions is made to have true ones. It is impossible to think either what is not, or what is contrary to one's impressions : and they are always true. What happens is that a man in a bad state of mind, and with correspondingly bad opinions is brought into a good state of mind with correspondingly good opinions—appearances which some people call truer, but I only better, and not truer at all. I am far from calling the wise frogs, my dear Socrates ; on the contrary, in relation to the body I call them doctors, and in relation to plants husbandmen. For husbandmen too, I assert, when their plants are ailing, create in them instead of bad sensations good and healthy sensations and “ truths,” and wise and good orators make useful

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<sup>29</sup> The style in this section is curiously abrupt, and a constantly recurring peculiarity is that the last half of one sentence and the first of the next properly belong together, so that each idea is, as it were, presented in two pieces. I think it possible that Plato is parodying Protagoras' style, though we have nothing to show what his style was.

things instead of harmful seem right to their cities. For whatever seems right and moral to each state that, I say, is so for it as long as it thinks so ; but the wise man in each case makes useful things appear and be real to them instead of harmful. On the same principles, too, the sophist who can train his pupils in this way is a wise man, and worth large fees to those he educates. And thus some people are wiser than others ; but no one has false opinions ; and you, whether you like it or not, must put up with being a measure : for these instances show that my theory is sound. But if you can dispute it from the beginning, dispute it by making a counter-statement of your own ; or, if you prefer question and answer, then by question and answer ; for a man of sense will not shrink from that either, indeed he will cordially invite it. But bear this in mind : you must be fair in your questions ; for it is quite illogical that a man who professes to care for virtue should be perpetually unfair in debate. And by unfairness in debate I mean this : when a man does not make a clear distinction between argument for argument's sake and real discussion ; in the one case jesting and tripping up his opponent whenever he can, but taking discussion seriously and helping his companion to avoid pitfalls, and only bringing home to him those errors into which he has been  
168 led either by his own carelessness or by the company he has kept. For if you do this, your companions will blame themselves for their own confusion and bewilderment, and not you, and they will follow after you and love you, and hate themselves and flee from themselves to the study of philosophy, so that they may become new men and be rid of their old selves. But if like most men you go the opposite way to work, the results will be opposite, too, and you will find your companions growing up to hate philosophy instead of loving it. If then you will be guided by me, as I said before, do not be ill-tempered or combative, but try to unbend and inquire, in a sympathetic spirit, what is really meant when one says that everything is in motion, and that what appears to anyone is real for him, whether an individual or a state. And proceed on this basis to inquire whether knowledge and sensation are the

same or different ; but do not argue, as you were doing just now, solely from the customary uses of names and words which the majority of people twist into all manner of meanings, and thereby puzzle each other unendingly." This, Theodorus, is what little I can furnish from my small resources in aid of your friend Protagoras. Had he been alive himself he would have given his own theory a far more magnificent defence.

## § 5

*Theodorus.* You jest, Socrates. Your defence of the man has been most dashing. *S.* Many thanks, my friend. But tell me, you noticed just now, I suppose, that when Protagoras was speaking he upbraided me for arguing with a child, and taking advantage of the boy's nervousness to attack his own theories ? He called it mere trifling and unworthy of the respect he claimed for " his measure of all things," and he bade me take his theory seriously. *T.* Of course I noticed it. *S.* Well, do you think I ought to obey him ? *T.* Assuredly. *S.* You see, then, that all here are children but you. So, if we are to obey the man, it is you and I who must ask each other questions and treat the argument with the seriousness it deserves, so that at least he may not charge us with making the discussion of his theory a game played with boys. *T.* Why, would not Theaetetus here follow an analysis better than many bearded elders ? *S.* But not better than you, Theodorus. You must not think that I am bound at any cost to defend your dead friend, and you not at all. So come, my good 169 man, go with me a little way, just far enough to determine whether after all you must be " a measure " in the matter of diagrams, or all men alike are sufficient for themselves in astronomy and all the other subjects in which you claim superior knowledge. *T.* It is not easy, Socrates, to sit by you and not to answer for one's opinions. But it seems I was talking nonsense, when I said just now that you would permit me to keep my coat on, and not force me into the ring like the Spartans : you seem to me to



model yourself rather on Sciron. For the Spartans bid one strip or depart; but you seem to behave more like Antaeus: you will not let any you meet go away till you have forced them to wrestle with you in argument. *S.* Theodorus, you have diagnosed my case most accurately: but I am still more violent than my predecessors. For times without number some Heracles or Theseus, a giant in argument, has fallen in with me and thrashed me soundly; but I keep to it all the same, so fearful is the passion that possesses me for this kind of contest. Then do not you be the one to grudge me a bout that will do both of us good. *T.* I give in. Lead me where you will: I must abide the destiny you decree for me, be it what it may, and suffer my refutation patiently.<sup>30</sup> But I am yours only so far as you proposed. *S.* That will be far enough. And pray, watch very carefully that we do not unintentionally give our argument a jesting turn, and earn another rebuke. *T.* Nay, I will try, as well as I can.

*S.* Let us then take up the same point as before, and see whether we were right or wrong in objecting to the theory because it made everyone alike sufficient for himself in point of intelligence—and Protagoras agreed that it did so, except that some people showed a superior perception of what was better or worse, and that these were the wise. Was it not so? *T.* Yes. *S.* Now, if he had been here, and we had had his assent from his own lips, instead of assenting for him ourselves in the course of our defence, there would have been no need to go back and make sure of our ground. But as it is, it may be said that we have no authority to agree to anything in his name. So we shall do well to come to a clearer understanding on the point: for it makes no little difference whether it is so or not.

*T.* True. *S.* Then let us settle the question, not through  
 170 a third person, but as shortly as possible by reference to his own argument. *T.* How? *S.* Thus: he says, I believe, that what appears to a man is real for him. *T.* He says so. *S.* And we on our side, Protagoras, are affirming what appears to a man, indeed to all men, when we affirm that there is no one who does not think himself wiser than others

<sup>30</sup> Theodorus is evidently parodying an epic or tragic couplet.

in some things and less wise in others ; and further that at times of great danger, in wars, pestilences or storms at sea, men look to those set over them as they would to gods, expecting to be saved by them, and that solely in virtue of their superior knowledge. The whole of human life is full of people seeking instructors and masters to direct themselves or other animals or teach the various crafts ; and correspondingly full of people who consider themselves capable of instructing and capable of governing. And in every case what else can we say than that men really believe in the existence of such things as human wisdom and ignorance ? *T.* I see nothing else for it. *S.* And wisdom they hold to be true opinion, and ignorance false opinion ? *T.* Well ?

*S.* What then, Protagoras, are we to make of your doctrine ? Are we to say that men's opinions are sometimes true and sometimes false ? For in either case I fear it follows that their opinions are not always true, but may be false also. For consider, Theodorus : would any disciple of Protagoras—you yourself, for instance—care to maintain that no man ever thinks another wrong in his opinions ? *T.* It is not to be believed, Socrates. *S.* And yet this is a necessary consequence of the proposition that man is a measure of all things. *T.* How, pray ? *S.* When you have come to some conclusion in your own mind, and express your opinion to me, let us admit that, as Protagoras says, that opinion is true for you. But are the rest of us precluded from judging your judgment ? Or, if not, do we invariably decide that your opinion is true ? On the contrary are there not always people without number to maintain the opposite opinion and think your judgments and ideas wrong ? *T.* Goodness knows there are, Socrates ;—“ thousands and tens of thousands ” as Homer would say “ are they ” who give me all the trouble in the world. *S.* What then ? Must we say that at such times your opinions are true to yourself, and false to the thousands of others ? *T.* That seems to follow from the argument, at any-rate. *S.* And what are they to Protagoras ? Does it not necessarily follow that, supposing he himself did not consider man to be a measure, nor the majority of people

171 wrote, would be a truth for nobody ; but if he himself either (as indeed they do not), that this " truth " which he thought so, while most people thought otherwise, you will see that, in the first place, the greater the majority of those who disagree over those who agree, so much the less true is it ? *T.* Necessarily so, if each man's opinion is to determine whether it is or is not. *S.* And, secondly, we are led to this charming dilemma. He himself, by allowing the opinions of everyone to be real, evidently admits the truth of the contrary opinion—the opinion of those who think his opinion false. *T.* Certainly. *S.* Then does he not admit his own opinion to be false, if he allows the opinion of those who think him in error to be true ? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* But the others do not admit that they are in error ? *T.* No indeed. *S.* And he on his part, by what he has written, admits this opinion to be true also ? *T.* So it appears. *S.* It results then from all this that everyone, from Protagoras down, will maintain—or rather, in his case, admit, by allowing the truth of his opponent's opinion—even he, I say, will admit that neither a dog nor any casual man is " a measure " in the case of anything at all that he has not learned. Is it not so ? *T.* It is. *S.* Since then it is combated by everyone, the " Truth " of Protagoras will be true to no one, not even himself.

*T.* Socrates, we are running my friend too hard. *S.* But is it so clear, my dear sir, that we are outrunning the limits of truth ? No doubt it is likely that as he is our elder he is wiser than we, and if at this moment he were to thrust up his head from the ground at our feet, he would very probably convict us both amply, me, of talking nonsense, and you, of agreeing with me, and so pop down again and be off at a run. However, I imagine we must make the best of ourselves as we are, and continue to say just what we think. And so now must we not regard it as universally admitted that one man is wiser or more ignorant than another ? *T.* I certainly think so. *S.* And we think further, do we not, that the theory is soundest in the form in which we subscribed to it when we were defending Protagoras—namely, that in most cases what appears to a man is real for him, in the case, that is, of heat,

dryness, sweetness, and all impressions of that type ; but that if there are any cases in which a difference between man and man can be allowed, it would be with regard to things healthful and things noxious ? It would be admitted, that is, that women, children and animals are not all capable of deciding what is healthy for themselves and of healing themselves ; but that here, if anywhere, there are differences. *T.* I certainly think so. *S.* And similarly in politics—that what each city thinks and lays down in its laws to be noble and ignoble, just and unjust, pious and impious, is really so for it ; and so far no single individual or city is a jot wiser than any other individual or city : but when it comes to deciding what is expedient or inexpedient for the city, here again, if anywhere, it will be admitted that one counsellor differs from another, and the opinion of one city from another, in point of truth ; and few would have the courage to declare that whatever a city thinks and decides to be expedient for itself must absolutely be so ; whereas in the other case, as I say, in the matter of justice and injustice, piety and impiety, they are prepared to maintain that nothing of the kind exists naturally and absolutely, but that the common opinion is true just when and so long as it is held to be true. This, I think, is the way in which those who do not accept Protagoras' theory in its entirety would argue the matter.<sup>31</sup> But I see, Theodorus, that one argument leads us to another, and a more weighty one still.<sup>32</sup> *T.* Well, is not our time our own, Socrates ?

## § 6

*S.* So it seems <sup>33</sup> ;—Many a time indeed have I observed,

<sup>31</sup> It is here admitted that this distinction is not Protagoras' own, though in § 4 it was, in fact, put into his mouth.

<sup>32</sup> What is the "more weighty" argument ? It is not given in the *Theaetetus* as we have it, for after the ensuing digression the Protagorean theory is dismissed with very little ceremony, and we proceed to the refutation of Heracliteanism and the deduction of the categories, both very loosely connected with what precedes, and, to my mind, evidently later insertions.

<sup>33</sup> This section—the slow movement—is written in Plato's stateliest and most resonant prose. It is a self-contained piece

my friend, and never more than now, how natural it is that those who have spent years in the study of philosophy make but a sorry show when they have to speak in the courts of law. *T.* In what way? *S.* To my mind those who from their youth up have trailed about in the law courts and such places compare with those who are brought up in philosophy and philosophical pursuits as slaves compare with freemen.<sup>34</sup> *T.* How? *S.* In this way: for the one class, as you said, their time is their own, and they spend it leisurely in peaceful talk; they pass at will from one theme to another—as, for the second time, we are doing ourselves—whenever some new problem takes their fancy more; and it is nothing to them whether their discourse be brief or lengthy, if only they attain the truth. But the others speak always in haste, hurried on by the flowing of the water-clock; nor are they free to speak of what they will, for the adversary stands over them, armed with compulsion, and in his hand the sworn statement, to which, as it is read point by point, all that they say must be confined. And their speech is ever of a fellow-slave and spoken to a master who sits there, with some case or other in his hand; and the issue is never indifferent, but always concerns the speaker himself; often too his very life is at stake. So  
 173 that from all this they grow tense and keen, knowing well how to flatter their master in words and earn his favour by deeds, but small and crooked in their souls; for all natural growth and uprightness and freedom has been lost through their lifelong slavery, which forces them to deal tortuously, casting on their yet tender souls a burden of great dangers and apprehensions, against which they cannot bear up, and be truthful and upright, but turn straightway to lying and giving evil for evil, so that they are continually bent and distorted and grow up with nothing healthy in their dispositions, though wondrously acute and wise

of the finest Greek oratory; and one half expects to hear “O men of Athens” at the beginning of each paragraph. It is, of course, impossible to reproduce the sweep and volume of the original in a translation.

<sup>34</sup> A writer of to-day would have made the contrast one between the student and the man of business.



in their own estimation.<sup>35</sup> Such, then, are these, Theodorus ; but the men of our own elect society—shall we describe them, too, or leave them, and return to our theme, that we may not abuse that free privilege of debate of which we spoke ? *T.* No, no, Socrates ; let us describe them first. For you say most justly that it is not we, the elect, who are the slaves of our arguments, but they that are, as it were, our slaves, and each of them must wait our pleasure for its completion : for there is no juror here, nor spectator at our elbow, as with the playwrights, to censure and lord it over us. *S.* Then let us (as is right, since you wish it), let us speak of the leaders of our society :—for why name those who only trifle with philosophy ? These are the men, are they not, who, in the first place, from their youth up, never learn their way to the place of assembly, nor know where the law courts or the senate house or any other public meeting place is at all : and laws or resolutions, written or recited, they neither see nor hear : and as for the ambitious heat of factions, their meetings, their dinners, their feasts graced by flute-girls—such doings never enter their minds even in their dreams. Whether this or that citizen is of high or low birth, or someone has inherited some taint of shame from an ancestor, male or female, he no more knows than he can count “the gallons in the sea.” And in all this he is ignorant of his very ignorance : for it is not to earn a reputation that he holds himself aloof ; but in very truth it is his body alone that is dwelling there in the city, while his soul, thinking all these things of little or no account, contemns them utterly and soars abroad, measuring out, as Pindar says, the levels of the earth and what beneath them lies, and star-gazing above the very heavens, searching out the whole nature of everything that is in its every part, but never 174 stooping to what is near at hand. *T.* And what is meant by this, Socrates ? *S.* For example, Theodorus—it chanced on a time that Thales, meditating on the stars and looking upwards, fell into a well, whereupon they tell us that a certain

<sup>35</sup> This abrupt bathos at the end of a sustained period is a peculiar artifice of Athenian rhetoric, and may easily be paralleled from the speeches of Demosthenes.



pretty and facetious Thracian maid-servant made mock of him because, said she, he wanted to know what was in the sky when he could not see what was before his feet. And the same jest applies to all who spend their lives in the pursuit of philosophy. For in very truth such a man is blind to his neighbours and those about him, and knows nothing of their doings—scarcely even whether they are men at all or some other sort of creature : but what Man is, and what it is the function and peculiar essence of Man's nature to do or to suffer—this he studies and labours unceasingly to discover. You understand me, Theodorus, do you not ?

*T.* I do indeed, and it is very true. *S.* Hence it is, my friend, that such a man, in public or private intercourse, when, as I said at first, he comes into a law court or other such place and is compelled to speak of what is before his eyes and at his feet, becomes the laughing-stock not only of Thracian maid-servants, but of the general rabble, falling into wells and every kind of difficulty through his inexperience ; and he bears himself so maladroitly that everyone thinks him the merest fool. When words are high he has no appropriate insults for anyone, since he knows no scandal about anyone, having never practised the art ; so his unreadiness makes him ridiculous : and when it is the time for compliments and flattery, he is discovered to be laughing, not in pretence but outright, so that people think him imbecile. For when he hears a tyrant or king being praised to the skies, he thinks it is some herdsman—some swineherd, shepherd or tender of cows—whom they are calling thrice happy for the abundance of milk his herd yields : it is a more fractious and treacherous animal, he thinks, that the king or tyrant herds and milks, yet he cannot but be just as rustic and uncultured as the herdsman by reason of the harassed life he leads in the castle that is his hut on the mountain. When he is told that some man is wonderfully rich, because he has ten thousand acres or more, it seems to him a mere trifle, for he has been accustomed to think of the whole earth. And when men sing the praises of long descent—how noble is the man who can point to a succession of seven rich ancestors, he thinks how short and dull the

175 sight of the flatterers must be, since, for lack of education,

they cannot fix their eyes steadily on the whole, and reflect that everyone has grandsires and ancestors in unnumbered thousands, and among them rich men and beggars, kings and slaves, Greeks and barbarians in myriads for everyone. When men pride themselves on a pedigree of twenty-five ancestors, and trace their line to Heracles, the son of Amphitryon, it seems to him that they show an amazing interest in trifles; and he laughs at them because they cannot reflect that the twenty-fifth before Amphitryon was, no doubt, just such a man as he may have happened to be, and the fiftieth before him no less, and so drive the silliness out of their vain souls. At all such times the philosopher earns the ridicule of the multitude, for being at one time, according to their ideas, loftily contemptuous, and at another ignorant of what lies before his feet and continually falling into difficulties. *T.* It is exactly as you say, Socrates.

*S.* Yes, my friend: but if he can draw the other with him up to the light and induce him to forget his legal formulæ, his “what have you against me?” or “I against you?” and turn to the consideration of absolute justice and injustice—the nature of each, and where they differ from other ideas or from each other; or make him forget to discuss whether a king is happy and possessed of much gold, and inquire instead about kingship in the abstract and the essence of human happiness and misery, and how the nature of man may attain the one and avoid the other;—when, I say, it is the other’s turn to explain all such matters, then indeed, our small-souled, hard-bitten lawyer gives the philosopher his revenge.<sup>36</sup> His brain reels as he floats on high, and when he gazes down from his unaccustomed perch he is bewildered and dismayed, and stammers things without meaning, and earns the ridicule, not indeed of Thracian maid-servants or anyone else who is uncultivated—for they do not perceive what is happening—but of all who have been brought up as free-men and not as slaves.

This then is the character of either, Theodorus, of the man nurtured in true freedom and leisure, whom you call the philosopher, to whom it is no disgrace

<sup>36</sup> Jowett.

to be thought foolish and of no account when by chance he has some servile task to perform, and shows that he does not know, for instance, how to tie up bedclothes, or sweeten a sauce or a sycophant's compliment :—and the other is the way of the man who can perform all such offices quickly and dexterously, but knows not how to toss his cloak round him like a free man, or take his turn in  
 176 a concert of reason and hymn aright the ideal life of gods and blessed men. *T.* Socrates, if you could persuade all men of what you say as you do me, there would be more peace and fewer evils among men. *S.* Nay, but evils are imperishable, Theodorus ; for there must ever be something that strives to thwart the good. In heaven there is not place for it, but mortal nature and this world of ours it haunts inevitably. Wherefore one must seek to escape from this life to that the soonest one may : and the way of escape is to grow as like divinity as mortal can : and to grow like divinity, is to become just, pious and wise.

But indeed, my good friend, it is by no means easy to persuade men that the true reason for fleeing evil and pursuing virtue is not the reason we so often hear—that one may be thought good by others. To my mind that is no more than an old wives' tale. Whereas the truth is this : God is perfectly and in all things righteous, and unrighteous in nothing ; nor is there anything more like Him than the man who grows as righteous as he can. It is here that one must look for a man's true cleverness, or his worthlessness and unmanliness. For the knowledge of this is wisdom and true virtue, and the ignorance of it is unwisdom and manifest evil ; and all else that is thought to be cleverness and wisdom, if it show itself in political power is vulgar, and in the arts is base. It is far better for those men who are unrighteous and speak or act impiously, that one should not admit the cleverness of their audacities ; for they glory in the reproach, and think it is being said of them that they are not empty chatterers, cumbering the earth to no purpose, but such men as all should be who hope to hold their own in the city. Therefore one must speak the truth, and say that the less they know what they really are, the worse is their condition : for they know not the punishment

that awaits unrighteousness, which one should know above all things. It is not what they think it, floggings and executions, which men sometimes suffer when they have done no wrong; but a punishment that none can escape. *T.* And what is that? *S.* My friend, there are two types established in the world, the divine which is most happy, and the godless which is most wretched. But these men are blind to them, and they do not perceive in their folly and ignorance that through their unrighteous deeds they are growing more and more like the one and unlike the other. Therefore they pay the penalty by living a life after the fashion of their choice: but if we tell them that, unless they rid themselves of their false cleverness, when they die, the world that is pure of evil will have no place for them, and that in this world they will ever lead a life after their own likeness, evil themselves and in evil company, all this to their superior cunning<sup>37</sup> sounds like the talk of fools. *T.* That is indeed, so, Socrates. *S.* Comrade, I know it. Nevertheless there is this that can happen. When it falls to them to reason in private of the things they despise—if they can find it in their hearts to make a stand for a while, and not run away like cowards, at the last, strangely enough, my friend, they grow dissatisfied with their own words, and that rhetoric of theirs somehow withers away, till they seem no wiser than children.—But these matters, which indeed were only mentioned by the way, it is time for us to leave: else they will crowd in upon us till our first question is buried out of sight. Let us, if you will, return to our subject. *T.* To me, Socrates, I must confess, such things are pleasant hearing, and easier to follow at my age. Still, if you think we must, let us go back.

## § 7

*S.* We had reached, I think, the point in our argument at which we were saying that those who upheld the reality of movement and the truth for the percipient of his momentary perceptions, were prepared to maintain their view more particularly in the case of justice, arguing that what

<sup>37</sup> Jowett.

a city considers and lays down to be just, is just for it, as long as it is so laid down : but as regards the good, we said that no one would have the courage to maintain that whatever a city thinks and lays down to be expedient for itself, is so for it, so long as it is so laid down—unless one chooses to go by the name alone ; and that, I imagine, would be simply making a jest of our discussion. Is it not so ? *T.* Certainly. *S.* He must speak not to the word, but to the thing under discussion. *T.* He must. *S.* Whatever name it may be that the city gives to expediency, it is that, certainly, at which it aims in its legislation ; and all its laws, in intention, and so far as it can, it makes with a  
 178 view to its own greatest advantage. That is its sole object, is it not ? *T.* Certainly. *S.* And does it always hit the mark, or does every city often miss it ? *T.* I certainly think they miss it.

*S.* Yes, and there is another way in which the same conclusion may be satisfactorily established—that is, by considering as a whole the class to which the expedient belongs ; for it is concerned—is it not ?—with the future. When we legislate, we do so with the idea that the laws we make will be useful for the time to come—which is properly called “the future.” *T.* Quite so. *S.* Come then, let us ask this question of Protagoras, or one of those who hold the same views :—“Man, you say, is a measure of all things, Protagoras ; of things white, things heavy, things light, and all of that type : for he has the criterion of them within himself ; he thinks them to be such as he perceives them, and in so doing thinks what is true to him and real.” Is it not so ? *T.* It is. *S.* “And, Protagoras, has he also in himself,” we will say, “the criterion of things that are going to be ; and do these likewise come to be for the percipient just what he thinks they will be ? Take heat, for instance : when a man with no medical training thinks he is going to have a fever—that is to say, that this form of heat will occur—and another, a doctor this time thinks otherwise, whose opinion shall we say will turn out to be the right one ? Or will the opinions of both be right, and the man become neither hot nor fevered to the doctor, but both to himself ?” *T.* But that would be ridiculous.



*S.* Again, I imagine that on the question whether a vintage will be sweet or dry, it is the vine-grower's opinion and not a harp-player's that is authoritative. *T.* Well? *S.* Similarly, in a question of harmony, the opinion of a wrestling-master will hardly be better than that of a musician, even as to what will appear in tune to the wrestling-master himself. *T.* Certainly not. *S.* And when a dinner is being prepared a guest who knows nothing of cookery will be less able to estimate his future pleasure than the cook. For as regards the pleasure that a man is feeling in the present, or has felt in the past, we will raise no objections at the moment, but will merely ask whether he is the best judge of what will appear and be to him in the future;—"would not you, Protagoras, be able to judge beforehand what rhetoric will carry conviction to our minds in a court of law, better than any layman whatever?" *T.* Why, that is just the point, Socrates, in which he used to claim quite positively that he had no rivals. *S.* Of course he did, my friend: for certainly no one would have paid large sums to attend his classes, had he not been 179 able to persuade his pupils, that neither a prophet nor any other man could judge what would appear and be in the future better than he could himself. *T.* Very true. *S.* Is not legislation also and the notion of expediency concerned with the future? And would not everyone admit that a city in its law making must necessarily often fall short of the highest utility? *T.* Assuredly. *S.* We can then reasonably say to your master that he must needs admit one man to be superior to another in wisdom, and that such a man is "a measure," while I who am ignorant am in no way compelled to become "a measure"—as, you remember, our speech in his defence would have made me, whether I liked it or not? *T.* This seems to me, Socrates, a complete disproof of the theory;—and you equally disproved it when you showed that it made the opinions of others conclusive, whereas those opinions were directly the contrary of his own. *S.* There are many other ways too, Theodorus, in which a theory that makes every man's opinion infallible might be refuted; but as regards one's immediate impressions, from which come the sensations and the opinions



related to them, the truth of these it is more difficult to disprove. Indeed, I may be quite wrong: possibly they are in truth irrefutable; and those who declare them to be clear evidence and to constitute knowledge may be stating the fact; in which case Theaetetus here was not so far wrong in identifying sensation and knowledge. We must therefore approach the question a little more closely, as the defence of Protagoras enjoined,<sup>38</sup> and test this moving reality to see whether it rings false or true;—you know that there has arisen no small dispute about it in many quarters.

### § 8

*T.* It is indeed very far from a small dispute, and what is more, in Ionia it is spreading far and wide; for the followers of Heraclitus champion the theory with all their might.<sup>39</sup> *S.* All the more, then, ought we to look into it from the beginning, my dear Theodorus, as they themselves put it before us. *T.* By all means. And indeed, Socrates, as regards these followers of Heraclitus or, as you say, of Homer or earlier sages still, the men of Ephesus—those, that

<sup>38</sup> At 168*b*;—but no one reading that passage would be led to expect the penetrating discussion that now ensues.

<sup>39</sup> The two following sections are in my opinion clearly later than the bulk of the dialogue. The point of view is far more advanced, and the treatment more direct and masterly. Plato is here in full possession of his philosophy, and completely conscious of its relation to previous systems. When the *Theaetetus* was first written he was mainly concerned with the doctrines of inferior and derivative philosophers—Socratics and Sophists like Antisthenes and Protagoras; but when he wrote § 8 and § 9 he had seen that it was really with Heraclitus and Parmenides, the original masters, that he had to deal, and he had conceived the plan of the *Sophist*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Politicus*. The *reductio ad absurdum* of the Heraclitean universe which follows really renders three-fourths of the preceding discussion superfluous; and a thinker who had discovered the categories could hardly have believed it necessary to demonstrate laboriously that perception is not knowledge because everyone admits that a cook knows more about cooking, and a musician more about music, than the unprofessional multitude.

Apart from this, it will be seen that the form of dialogue in

is, who profess to be experts—are no more open to discussion than lunatics ; they are positively as full of movement as their treatises ; and as for keeping to an argument or a question, asking and answering quietly in their turn, they have not the very slightest idea how to do it. Indeed 180 their chief peculiarity, is their entire and absolute lack of repose in every conceivable relation. If you ask any of them anything, they snatch from their quivers, as it were, little oracular aphorisms and let fly at you ; and if you try to get from them an explanation of one statement you are straightway shot with another full of strange metaphors, and you will never be able to arrive at any conclusion at all with any of them. Nor indeed are they any better with each other : on the contrary, they take very good care indeed not to allow anything to be settled in any way, either in argument or in their own minds—thinking, I presume, that that would be something stationary ; and against what is stationary they have declared war to the knife, and do their best to exterminate it altogether.<sup>40</sup> *S.* Possibly, Theodorus, you have only seen them fighting, and have never been with them when they are at peace ; for they are not of your school. But I imagine that they speak differently when they are at leisure and teaching the disciples whom they wish to make like themselves. *T.* Pupils, my good sir ! Why, you never find one a pupil of another among these people ; they sprout up unbidden, each just where the inspiration has seized him, and each thinks the other hopelessly ignorant. From men like these, as I was going to say, you can never get a connected account of anything, either with their will or against it. The only thing to do is to take their theory from them, and investigate it for oneself as one would a problem.

these two sections shows a marked change ; in the one Theodorus, and in the other Theaetetus, are allowed to say a great deal more than usual—a great deal more, indeed, than it is at all natural for them to say. In truth, a conversation is hardly the best vehicle for a set criticism of Heracliteanism, and not much more suitable for an exposition of the categories.

<sup>40</sup> This spirited piece of satire is certainly quite out of keeping with the character of Theodorus, who never takes the bit between his teeth in this way in the rest of the dialogue.

S. What you say is very reasonable. And as for the problem, do we not know what it is of old? The ancients concealed it for the most part in a poetic guise, saying that the parents of all things are Oceanus and Tethys, moving floods, and that nothing stands still; and later seers, being wiser, no doubt, have declared it openly, so that even cobblers may understand their wisdom when they hear it, and no longer imagine vainly that some things in the world stand still and others move, but know that everything moves, and honour their teachers accordingly. I was nearly forgetting too, Theodorus, that there are others who uphold just the opposite view, that, for example, "motionless is that to which in its entirety we give the name of Being," and the rest of the principles that a Melissus or a Parmenides<sup>41</sup> maintains against all the other school, namely, that all things are one, and the whole stands still and self-contained, having no space wherein to move. With all these theorists, my friend, how are we to deal? For in our gradual progress we have fallen unawares between the two parties;<sup>42</sup> and unless we find some way of warding them off and making  
 181 our escape, we shall pay the penalty, like the players at the line in the wrestling school when they are caught by both sides and pulled in opposite directions. It seems to me, then, that we must begin with those whom we first propose to discuss, the professors of instability; and if we find their views reasonable we will help them to pull us over to their side, and try to get away from the others; but if the partisans of "the Whole" seem to be nearer the truth, we will make our escape to them away from those who would "move what should be left unmoved." But if neither party's doctrine turns out to be satisfactory, we shall make a very ridiculous appearance, thinking our worthless selves to be right and presuming to depreciate ancient sages of renown! Consider then, Theodorus, whether it is worth

<sup>41</sup> On Parmenides and the Eleatics, see J. Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1892), pp. 180-206 and 322-347; on Parmenides especially, J. F. Ferrier's *Lectures on Greek Philosophy* (new edition, Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 88-102, to which Dr Reich has called my attention. The Eleatic philosophy will have to be considered in connection with the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*.

<sup>42</sup> See the *Introduction*, page xvii.

while to run such a risk. *T.* And yet not to examine what each party says would be unbearable, Socrates.

*S.* Then it must be done, since you are so willing. It seems to me, then, that we should begin our inquiry with the question of motion, and ask what exactly they mean when they say that everything moves. That is to say—do they mean one form of motion, or, as I think, two? But it must not be what I think only; you must join with me, so that if indeed we have to be punished, we shall be punished together. So tell me: you call it motion, do you not, when anything changes its place, or revolves in one place? *T.* I do. *S.* Let this then be one kind. But when a thing, without stirring, grows old, or turns from white to black, or from soft to hard, or suffers any other form of alteration, ought we not to call this another kind of motion? *T.* I think so. *S.* Nay, it is certain. These two, then, I pronounce to be the two forms of motion—alteration, and movement in space. *T.* Quite right. *S.* And now, having made this distinction we are in a position to speak to those who say that everything moves, and put this question to them: Do you mean that everything moves in both ways, spatially and by alteration, or some things one way and some the other? *T.* For my part, I certainly cannot tell; but I imagine they would say—in both ways. *S.* Assuredly, my friend. For if not they will have things standing still as well as moving, and it will be no more right to say that everything moves than that everything stands still. *T.* Very true. *S.* Since then everything must move, and there must be no absence of motion in anything, it follows that everything moves perpetually with every sort of motion.<sup>43</sup> *T.* Necessarily so. 182

<sup>43</sup> Th. Gomperz, *Griechische Denker*, vol. ii. pp. 444 - 445, regards this as an obvious fallacy, "einen denkwürdigen Fehlschluss," because a thing may be in motion in one respect and at rest in another! It is in reality a perfectly sound and trenchant piece of criticism. On the Heraclitean theory everything must be in motion; the whole world is a process of change; and that qualities should be permanent when things are not, is not only unthinkable in itself, but would contradict the whole tenor of the doctrine—it would simply transfer to the properties of objects the reality that is expressly denied to the objects themselves.

*S.* Now pray consider this point. We were saying, I think, that they explained the production of heat or whiteness somewhat in this way: each of these qualities was in motion between the agent and the patient simultaneously with the sensation; the patient became not sensation, but a percipient, and the agent not a quality, but a thing qualified. . . . But possibly the word quality<sup>44</sup> has an unfamiliar sound; and it may be that you do not follow me when I put it in this summary form. Take it in detail:—the agent becomes neither heat nor whiteness in general, but a hot thing or a white thing; and so in each case. For you will no doubt remember that we put it in this way before—namely, that nothing is absolute and independent, nor are agent and patient independent either; but it is by their mutual interaction that they give rise to the sensations and the objects of sensation, and become themselves, the one, a thing with qualities, the other, a percipient.

*T.* I remember, of course. *S.* Now the details of the theory we can dismiss without inquiring into their truth or falsity; let us keep the object of our argument solely in mind, and ask:—You say that all things move and flow, do you not? *T.* Yes. *S.* And do they not move with both of the motions we distinguished, moving in space and altering as well? *T.* Assuredly, if the motion is to be complete. *S.* Now, if the motion were spatial only, without alteration, we should be able, I imagine, to say what qualities the moving things have; should we not? *T.* Yes. *S.* But since not even the fact that the flowing thing flows white is permanent, but here, too, there is change, and the whiteness itself flows and changes into another colour, in order that we may not catch it in the act of being still—is it possible to give any colour a name that will really apply to it? *T.* How could one, Socrates, or indeed anything else of the kind, if it always shifts away while you are in the act of speaking—as it must, since it flows? *S.* And what shall we say about a sensation, such as sight or hearing? Do they ever stand still and remain sight and hearing? *T.* They cannot, if everything moves. *S.* Then we must never speak of seeing more than

<sup>44</sup> The abstract word was presumably, then, Plato's invention.



of not seeing, or of any other sensation more than of its absence; since all things are absolutely in motion. *T.* No. *S.* But sensation, surely, is knowledge, as Theaetetus and I were saying? *T.* That is so. *S.* Then when we were asked what knowledge is, our answer no more described knowledge than it did not-knowledge? *T.* So it seems. *S.* This would be a fine result truly of our attempt to find a basis for our definition. We were bent on showing that all things are in motion, in order to prove that our answer to the question was correct; and it turns out, apparently, that if all things are in motion, every answer on any subject at all is equally correct—either that it is so, or that it is not so—or “becomes,” if you prefer it, so as to say nothing that would bring them to a standstill. <sup>45</sup> *T.* You are right.

*S.* Right, Theodorus, except in saying “so” and “not so.” <sup>46</sup> We ought not even to use the word “so,” for “so” would no longer be in motion; nor again “not so,” for neither is that motion. In fact, we shall have to supply these theorists with some quite different language; since at present they have no vocabulary that is consistent with their own principles, unless it be “not anyhow,” for that, spoken quite indefinitely, would be the phrase that fits their theory best. *T.* Certainly that is their most natural dialect! *S.* Then I think, Theodorus, that we have relieved ourselves of your friend Protagoras, and must decline for the present to admit his contention that any man is a measure of everything—except a man who has some special knowledge: and equally we will decline to admit that knowledge and sensation are the same,

<sup>45</sup> Campbell.

<sup>46</sup> The Heracliteans and allied schools were fond enough of exemplifying the master's doctrine that “one could never step into the same river twice,” by arguing that no word ever meant the same to two people, or even that all predication was, strictly speaking, an impossibility, because the subject had changed before the predicate could be applied to it. But it did not occur to them that the mere existence of language, however one might try to explain its meaning away, implied the existence of *some* identity—*some* permanence and reality, that was exempt from the universal law of change.



at least on the principle of universal motion—unless Theaetetus here has anything to say to the contrary. *T.* An excellent suggestion, Socrates; for now that this argument is completed I too must be relieved of my duty of answering your questions, as it was agreed I should be when the discussion of Protagoras' theory came to an end.<sup>47</sup>

*Theaetetus.* No, no, Theodorus; not until you and Socrates have examined the others, too, those who say the universe stands still, as you proposed just now. *Theodorus.* So young, Theaetetus, and teaching your elders to violate their solemn agreements! Come; prepare to account to Socrates for the rest of the matter. *Theaetetus.* Yes, if he wishes; but I should very much like to hear him discuss what I say. *Theodorus.* Who challenges Socrates to an argument challenges horsemen to fight on the plain. Ask then, and you shall hear. *Socrates.* It seems to me, however, Theodorus, that I am not going to do what Theaetetus bids me. *T.* Why not, pray? *S.* Melissus, and the others who say that the universe is a motionless and single whole, I shrink from discussing, for fear that we might prove unworthy to scrutinise their teachings—those of Parmenides above all the rest! Parmenides in my eyes is, as Homer says, “reverend, ay, and awful.” For I had some converse with the man when I was very young and he very old; and there seemed to me to be to a depth about him that was altogether noble.<sup>48</sup>

184 I am afraid then that we might not understand his words, and that his inner meaning would be further still beyond our ken; but most of all, that the first object of our discussion, the nature of knowledge, would be lost to view in the crowd of questions that will pour in upon us, if we let them—the more so since that which we have in hand is infinitely various, and if we discuss it only by the way it will get less

<sup>47</sup> The original agreement with Theodorus (169a) certainly did not contemplate an excursus on Heracliteanism in general. The proper moment of his release arrived at 179c. It is another proof that this section is a later insertion. Theodorus is retained as the interlocutor to distinguish § 8 from § 9, in which Theaetetus takes his place.

<sup>48</sup> There is something singularly impressive in this little eulogy, as if Plato were speaking from his heart.

than its due, but if at the length it deserves, it will put the question of knowledge altogether out of sight.<sup>49</sup> We must not contemplate either result, but try, by the art of midwifery, to deliver Theaetetus of the notions he has conceived regarding knowledge. *T.* If you think so then, it must be done.

## § 9

*Socrates.* Come, then, Theaetetus, consider just this further point. You answered that knowledge was sensation, did you not? *Theaetetus.* Yes. *S.* Now if anyone were to ask you—with what does a man see white and black objects, and with what does he hear high and low notes?—you would say, I imagine, with his eyes and with his ears. *T.* I should. *S.* Now, as a rule, it is a mark of good breeding not to lay excessive stress on words and phrases or analyse them too minutely; indeed it is, if anything, ill-bred to do otherwise. Sometimes, however, one cannot avoid it; and in the present case, for example, I am bound not to let the want of correctness in your answer pass. For consider which answer is the more true—that the eyes are that *with which* we see, or that *by means of which* we see, and the ears that *with which* we hear, or that *by means of which* we hear.<sup>50</sup> *T.* That by means of which, rather than that with which, *Socrates*, in both cases. *S.* Yes; for would it not be strange indeed, boy, if there were many sensations inhabiting us as if we were Wooden Horses, and they did not all converge to some comprehensive unity, a soul, or whatever it should be called, *with which*, *by means of* them (as if by means of instruments)

<sup>49</sup> Why, then, is Parmenides mentioned at all? Because Plato intended the revised *Theaetetus* to be an introduction to the group of the “dialectic” dialogues, the *Sophist*, the *Politicus*, and the *Parmenides*, in which he finally develops his complete system in relation to the whole of philosophy as it was known up to his time.

<sup>50</sup> The distinction in Greek is between the instrumental case and the preposition “through” with the genitive. It cannot be brought out so clearly in English.

we perceive the objects of sensation ? *T.* Yes, that seems to me the better way of looking at it.

*S.* Now why do I make these fine distinctions ? If there is some identical part of ourselves with which we apprehend white and black by means of the eyes, and other objects by means of the other organs, and you can reasonably refer all such sensations to the body. . . . But perhaps it will be better for you to say it, in answer to a question, than that I should take all the trouble for you. Tell me, then ; do you not regard the means by which you perceive heat, hardness, lightness, sweetness, as belonging to the body ? Or to what else do they belong ? *T.* To the body, certainly. *S.* And would you agree that what you perceive by  
185 means of one faculty, you cannot perceive by means of another—the objects of hearing, for instance, by means of sight, or the objects of sight by means of hearing ? *T.* Of course I would. *S.* If, then, you think anything about both objects, it cannot be something you perceive through either of the two organs, since it is common to both. *T.* No. *S.* Take sound and colour :—do you not think about both of them that they are ? *T.* That is so. *S.* And that each is other than the other, and the same with itself ? *T.* What then ? *S.* And that both together are two, and each one ? *T.* That also. *S.* And can you not also distinguish whether they are like or unlike each other ? *T.* Perhaps so. *S.* Through what organ then are you able to apprehend all these things about them ? For neither through hearing nor through sight is it possible to perceive what is common to both objects. And here is a further example of what I mean. If it were possible to examine a sound and a colour and see if they were sweet or salt, you will of course be able to say with what you would examine them ; and that, evidently, is neither sight nor hearing, but something else. *T.* There is no difficulty about that : it is the faculty of taste.

*S.* Quite right. But what faculty is it that reveals to you what is applicable in common not only to these two objects, but to all objects—that, I mean, which you express by the words, “is” and “is not” and the other terms about which we were asking ? What organ will you assign to all these, by means of which the percipient part of us perceives each of

them? *T.* You mean being and not-being, and likeness and unlikeness, and the same and the other—yes, and unity and the rest of number. I can see too that you are thinking of odd and even, and all that follows from them;—and you mean, through what bodily organ do we apprehend them with our souls? <sup>51</sup> *S.* You follow me most admirably, Theaetetus; that is just my question. *T.* In very truth, Socrates, I cannot say, except that there seems to me, in the first place, to be no organ at all peculiar to these objects as there is to the others, but the soul itself by its own agency appears to me to apprehend these common notions about all objects.

*S.* Theaetetus, you are beautiful, and not ugly, as Theodorus was saying, for he who speaks beautifully is beautiful and good himself. And besides being beautiful, you have done me a service by saving me a very lengthy argument, if you are of opinion that the soul apprehends some things by its own agency, and some by that of the bodily faculties. For this was what I thought myself, and I wished you to think so too. *T.* Well, that is certainly my opinion. 186 *S.* In which class, then, do you place being? For this is more especially present in every case. *T.* I should class it with what the soul apprehends by itself. *S.* And likeness and unlikeness, and sameness and otherness too? *T.* Yes. *S.* Very good:—and beauty and ugliness and goodness and evil? *T.* In the case of these, too, it seems to me particularly true that the soul examines their being by comparison, reflecting in itself on the present and the past in relation to the future.<sup>52</sup> *S.* Stop a moment! Will not the soul perceive the hardness of what is hard through the touch, and the softness of what is soft likewise? *T.*

<sup>51</sup> This sudden burst of inspiration on the part of Theaetetus is wholly out of character.

<sup>52</sup> We are certainly not to understand that beauty and goodness are merely relative, but that it is one of the essential functions of consciousness to compare and class objects under these categories. They are among the forms of thought. The absolute goodness and beauty of a concrete reality is another matter altogether; what we are here considering is simply how the mind thinks them. Plato, in short, lays down a category of "value" (literally "utility"), as he calls it, lower down, and this is not the least remarkable feature of the discussion.

Yes. *S.* But their being—that they *are*—and the opposition between them, and the being, again, of this opposition, the soul itself tries to discern for us by meditating on them and comparing them. *T.* Certainly.

*S.* Is it not the case that the one class of impressions both men and animals are naturally capable of receiving as soon as they are born, namely, those that reach the soul by way of the body; while as for the reflexions about them, as regards being and value, these are acquired, by such as do acquire them, slowly and with difficulty, through much experience and training? *T.* Most assuredly. *S.* Now can one attain truth if one cannot attain being? *T.* It is impossible. *S.* And if one falls short of the truth about anything, can one ever know it? *T.* No, how could one, Socrates? *S.* Knowledge then resides not in sense impressions, but in the process of reflexion about them; for it is there, we find, and not in the impressions that one can apprehend being, and therefore truth. *T.* So it appears. *S.* Then can you call these two the same when they show such differences? *T.* No, that would certainly not be justified. *S.* Then what name do you give to the first class—seeing, hearing, smelling, being cold, being warm? *T.* I call it perceiving—what else? *S.* As a whole, then, you call it perception? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* And perception, we agree, is not in a position to apprehend truth as it cannot apprehend being? *T.* No. *S.* And therefore it cannot attain knowledge? *T.* No. *S.* Then knowledge and sensation, Theaetetus, cannot possibly be the same thing. *T.* It appears not, Socrates; indeed it is now more than ever clear that knowledge is something other than sensation.

NOTE ON SECTION 9.—This remarkable passage, which contains more truly original thought than all the preceding sections of the dialogue together, is no less than a “deduction of the categories” in the Kantian sense. It is true, of course, that Kant’s point of view is in some respects more advanced than that of Plato. Plato does not seem to be so clearly conscious of the active work of the mind in constructing an intelligible experience from the data of sense. He does not speak of a “*synthetic* unity of apperception,” or of the function of the imagination in ordering and correlating the matter of sense perception. The sensations only “converge



on to a single form " or individual entity, the function of which is, so far, passive. But the essence of the doctrine, the discovery that the whole form of experience, the entire scheme of judgments by which we present the world to ourselves, comes from the mind alone, is plainly there ; and the fact that here for the first time we have a definite statement of the greatest principle in the whole range of philosophy raises the *Theaetetus* to the dignity of a historical event.

There are, indeed, two all-important doctrines that Plato lays down—first, the independent unity of the subject ; and secondly, its function in forming judgments of objects. It has already been shown (160*b*) that, on a complete theory of relativity, the subject has no existence except as the subject of an object ; it is merely one term in a relation, without an independent being of its own : indeed, in the last analysis it has no identity at all, since every relation of object to subject is unique, and it is only in virtue of that relation that the subject *is* a subject. But here we have a definite identical unity of consciousness set over against the diversity of experience.

And the function of this unity, the form that consciousness takes, is to be found in the "apprehension" of these "things common to" all objects, which occurs when "the soul considers" or "reflects about what is, by its own agency"—that is, in judgments of being and not-being, sameness and otherness, likeness and unlikeness, and the rest, to which Plato, perhaps alone among philosophers, adds value.

According to Zeller, these "reflexions" are Ideas ! That is to say, they are absolute types of classes in the same way as the Idea of man, or the Idea of political society, the only difference being that one set of notions is more general than the other. Plato, according to Zeller,\* aspired to a science which, by the enumeration and comparison of *all* concepts, should embrace the whole world of Ideas. But "he himself," we are told, "has made no more than a feeble beginning in that direction," and we are referred to the present passage in the *Theaetetus*, to 182*a* (quality), to the "greatest kinds" of the *Sophist* (which I mention below), and to a passage in the *Republic* explaining relativity ; the conclusion being that though the germ of the Aristotelian categories is there, yet Plato has never attempted to draw up "a complete list of the primary concepts and arrange them according to their relations" ;—that is, in the whole of a long life he never attempted (or only by way of a "feeble beginning") what he conceived to be the real central task of philosophy ! The Zellerian reconstruction of Plato is astonishingly like a house of cards.

And what nonsense it makes of the *Theaetetus* ! Is it not preposterous to suppose that the dialogue suddenly invades the world of reality, gives us, as it were, the whole of knowledge at a breath,

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\* *Op. cit.* II. i.<sup>4</sup> pp. 704-7.



and then proceeds to discuss the origin of error in phenomenal experience as if nothing had happened? The essence of the demonstration is that these concepts are not the *content* of knowledge, but its *form*. Knowledge is precisely the perception or, as we should say, affirmation, of being and of sameness and otherness. It is true that these primary judgments are given in the form of substantive concepts; but so they are in Kant. That they are not concepts in the same way as man or justice or a triangle is a concept is not only evident in itself, but is shown quite clearly by the passage in the *Timaeus* (37a-b), where Plato gives an imaginary account of the construction of the soul. "When," we are told, the soul "comes in contact with anything that exists in a scattered form" (*i.e.* anything material), "or is indivisible" (*i.e.* ideal), "it vibrates throughout itself, and declares with what anything is identical, and from what it is different, and in what relation, where, how, and when it is found that each object is, or is acted upon, in relation to each, both in the world of becoming and in [relation to] \* the world of eternally changeless being." The "declaration" of identity and difference is, in fact, as the whole of the *Theaetetus* presupposes, the Platonic formula for knowledge.†

The best account of the whole passage that I have seen is that given by Natorp ‡; but he also, I think, lays too much stress on the aspect of the categories as concepts, speaking of them as if they were parallel with the five "greatest kinds" of the *Sophist* (254c, *sqq.*)—being, sameness, otherness, motion, rest. But these are "kinds," classes of existence, an expression that is nowhere applied to the categories of the *Theaetetus*; they are the primary objects of the "reflexions," and not the "reflexions" themselves. The categories of the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus* are categories in the strict sense. They are the general form and framework of our judgments of objects.

Gomperz also recognises that Plato has categories in mind; but on one point he has a criticism which makes one doubt whether he knows what a category is. "Die Sinnenwahrnehmung," he says, § " . . . wird uns sofort von der Geburt an zu teil — wobei nebenbei bemerkt die allmählig erworbene Deutung und Auslegung der Sinneseindrücke übersehen wird." But the "interpretation and explanation of sense-impressions" is performed by the instrumentality of the categories; and the true objection to Plato's exposition is exactly the opposite. It is that he makes the correlation of the data of sense not an original faculty but the product of time and experience; whereas in

\* So the Greek text, but the preposition should, no doubt, be emended.

† See the *Excursus*, pp. 99 and 102.

‡ P. Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre*, p. 109 *et seq.*

§ *Op. cit.* II., p. 445.

fact the barest and most rudimentary act of sensation involves a judgment under the form of the categories — if only that of being. But very possibly Plato had not put the question properly to himself, for the *Timaeus* makes the power of judging in the forms of the categories an essential part of the structure of the soul.

It was generally supposed that the categories were the invention of Aristotle; but it has recently been shown by A. Gercke\* that they cannot originate with him, because the complete traditional list of ten (including motion and rest, action and passion, "position" and "habit") only occurs twice, and that in his earliest work: they are mentioned from the first as matters of general knowledge, and the six just named are scarcely used at all. It is to be presumed, then, that they were a tradition of the Academy, the list having been pieced together from various passages in Plato—and in such a way as to obscure his real meaning; for they were interpreted (and Aristotle so uses them) not as forms of "reflexion" but as classes of existing things. Aristotle is even capable of arguing that the Good cannot be an Idea because it belongs to the category of quality, and reality implies the category of substance!

I will only add that Plato shows the most admirable sense in carefully avoiding any pretence at dogmatic completeness in his exposition. The list of the categories and the terms in which they are described are varied in every possible way,† and nothing is said to imply that there is a fixed and definite number of such notions, or to suggest that they are, so to say, a rigid mechanism which the mind employs in one way and no other. This, I think, constitutes a distinct point of superiority over Kant's "deduction."

## II

### TRUE AND FALSE OPINION

#### § 10

S. WELL, but it was not for this that we began our dis- 187  
cussion, to find out what knowledge is not, but what it is.  
However, we have at any rate discovered that we must not  
look for it in sensation at all, but in that function, whatever  
its name may be, which the soul exercises when it considers

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\* *Ursprung der Aristotelischen Kategorien*, in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, IV. (1891), p. 424 sqq.

† But never in such a way as to suggest that they are Ideas!

things by its own agency. *T.* That, I think, is called opinion, Socrates.<sup>53</sup> *S.* Quite right, my friend. And now, take up the question from the beginning again, dismiss all that has passed, and see if your ideas are any clearer now that you have got so far. Tell me again—what is knowledge? *T.* We cannot say that all opinion is knowledge, Socrates, since there is false opinion as well as true; but it seems likely that true opinion is knowledge, so let us take this as my answer. For if, as we proceed, it turns out to be wrong, we can but say something else. *S.* That is the way to talk, Theaetetus, answering with a will, and not timidly, as you did at first; for at this rate either we shall find what we are seeking, or at least we shall be less inclined to think we know what we do not know at all; and that in itself would be no mean reward. So then—what is it you say? Taking the two kinds of opinions, one true and the other false, you lay it down that true opinion is knowledge? *T.* I do: that is my present opinion.

*S.* I wonder now if we ought to go back, and take up the question about opinion . . . ? *T.* What question do you mean? *S.* Something that has often worried and indeed perplexed me terribly, both in my own thoughts and in conversation with others—as in truth it does now—I mean, the fact that I cannot tell what this affection in our minds really is, and how it arises there. *T.* What affection? *S.* Having false opinions.—At this moment I am in two minds whether we should pass it by, or discuss it again, but not in the same way as we did a little while ago. *T.* Surely, Socrates, if you think it at all necessary. Were not you and Theodorus speaking just now about the philosopher's leisure, and saying very truly that in these discussions there is no need to hurry? *S.* A very sensible reminder. And perhaps it would not be amiss if we went back, so to say, over our tracks; for it is surely better to accomplish a little well than a great deal imperfectly. *T.* Well?

*S.* Come then; what is our position? We say that there is such a thing, on occasion, as false opinion, and

<sup>53</sup> On the significance of this part of the dialogue, see the *Excursus*, II.

that one man has false opinions and another true, and the difference is a real difference. *T.* We do. *S.* Now are there not these two alternatives before us, generally and 188 in any given case—that a thing is either known or not known? I dismiss for the moment learning and forgetting, as things intermediate, for they are irrelevant to our present argument.<sup>54</sup> *T.* Well, then, Socrates, there is no alternative in the case of anything but to know it or not to know it. *S.* This being so, is it not self-evident that if a man conceives an opinion, it must be of something he knows or something he does not know? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* Moreover if one knows anything, it is impossible not to know it; or if one does not know it, to know it. *T.* Of course. *S.* Then does the man who has a false opinion think that something he knows is not that, but something else that he also knows; <sup>55</sup> and thus, knowing both, not know either? *T.* It is impossible, Socrates. *S.* Then is it something that he does not know that he thinks to be something else that he does not know—that is, for a man who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates, to take it into his head that Socrates is Theaetetus, or Theaetetus Socrates? *T.* How could that be? *S.* And yet I suppose a man does not think something he knows to be something he does not know; or again something he does not know to be something he knows? *T.* No, that would be contrary to nature. *S.* Then what other way is there of having a false opinion? For evidently it is impossible to have an opinion at all apart from the cases we have mentioned; since we either know or do not know everything,

<sup>54</sup> They are certainly not irrelevant in one way; for it is precisely in these "intermediate" processes that knowledge (or "opinion," the knowledge of the phenomenal world) is seen to be a matter of degree, to admit of more or less clearness, distinctness, and completeness. But Plato conceives knowledge as the cognition of what shortly afterwards he calls "a single entity," an object of which is either known or not known as a whole; and it is the inapplicability of this conception to the world of appearance that he intends to demonstrate.

<sup>55</sup> "Opinion" throughout this part of the dialogue means what we call "judgment," the affirming a predicate of a subject, the assertion that A is B; but it is restricted to the case of identifying an object as something previously perceived.

and it appears impossible to have a false opinion in either case. *T.* Very true.

*S.* Then perhaps we ought to look at the question from the point of view not of knowing and not-knowing, but of being and not-being. *T.* How do you mean? *S.* It may be a simple solution to say that the man who thinks what is not about anything will inevitably have a false opinion, whatever may be the disposition of his mind in other respects. *T.* That certainly seems reasonable. *S.* Well then, what shall we say Theaetetus, if someone asks us—"But is what you say possible for anyone, and can any man think the thing that is not, either about something that is, or in itself?"<sup>56</sup> To which, I imagine, we shall answer—"Yes; when he is thinking something that is not true," shall we not? *T.* Yes. *S.* Now does this occur in any other case? *T.* What? *S.* Does a man see a thing and yet see nothing? *T.* How could he? *S.* Evidently not; for if he sees a single particular thing, he sees a thing that is. Or do you, by chance, think that unity belongs to what is not? *T.* I do not, certainly. *S.* Then who sees a single thing, sees a thing that is. *T.* So  
 189 it seems. *S.* And in the same way he who hears, hears a single particular object, and hears something that is. *T.* Yes. *S.* And the man who touches something, touches a single particular object, and therefore something that is. *T.* That also follows. *S.* Now does not the man who thinks, think some single particular thing? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* But in thinking some single particular thing, does he not think something that is? *T.* I agree. *S.* Then the man who thinks what is not, thinks nothing? *T.* Apparently. *S.* But the man who thinks nothing, does not think at all. *T.* That seems to me evident. *S.* Then it is not possible to think what is not either about something that is, or by itself. *T.* Apparently not. *S.* Then false opinion is something

<sup>56</sup> A well-known contemporary paradox with which earlier philosophers and Sophists had made great play. It certainly perplexed Plato (whose fate—or fortune?—it was to have to wrestle with the simplest problems of language and predication) for a long time, and it is only in the *Sophist* that he clearly distinguishes not-being in the sense of non-existence from not-being in the sense of otherness.



else than thinking what is not. *T.* It seems so. *S.* Thus this method has not given us false opinion any more than the one we tried before. *T.* No, it certainly has not.

*S.* But may we perhaps account for what we call "false opinion" in this way.<sup>57</sup> *T.* How? *S.* We say that false opinion is a sort of "other-thinking" which occurs when a man says that something actual is something else actual, transposing them in his mind; for in this way he is always thinking something that is, but one thing instead of another; and since he misses what he was aiming at in his thought he may fairly be said to have a false opinion. *T.* I think now that you have put it exactly. For when a man thinks ugliness instead of beauty or beauty instead of ugliness then his opinion is truly false. *S.* I see plainly, Theaetetus, that you think very little of me, and are not afraid of me at all. *T.* Why, pray? *S.* Apparently you suppose I should never fasten on your "truly false" and ask you if a thing can be slowly swift or heavily light, or that anything should happen in a way that expressly contradicts its own nature. However, I pass this by, not to dash your hopes. You say then that you accept the definition of false opinion as other-thinking? *T.* I do. *S.* It is possible then, in your opinion, to think one thing as another, and not as itself? *T.* Yes, it is. *S.* Now, when anyone's mind does this, does it not necessarily follow that it is thinking of either one or both? *T.* Most assuredly—either together, or each in turn. *S.* Excellent. And by "thinking," do you mean the same thing as I do? *T.* And what is that? *S.* A statement that the soul makes

<sup>57</sup> The following paragraph appears to me to be a later insertion. It is introduced abruptly, and ends with a repetition of the remark that has just preceded—"we have not been able to show . . . by this method any more than by the other." It is not necessary to the argument. It is not very well written: the mention of beauty and ugliness a few lines below is unnatural, and, as will be seen, premature; and the jest about "truly false" is worthy of the *Philebus*. Finally, the interpretation of "not-being" as "otherness," which it in fact implies, shows that the discussion in the *Sophist* is in Plato's mind: and the irrelevant analysis of the process of "opinion" (judgment) also belongs to the period of the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*, in both of which the question is discussed at some length (see note<sup>40</sup>, p. 138).



to itself about whatever it is considering. I do not put it to you as something I know to be true; but I have an inkling that when the soul is thinking of anything it simply  
 190 converses with itself, asking itself questions, and answering, and affirming or denying. And when it solves its doubts, and moves, whether suddenly or deliberately, to a definite conclusion, which it affirms without further hesitation, this I regard as its opinion. So that in my view to have an opinion is, in fact, to speak; and opinion is a speech, which is not, however, spoken to another, or aloud, but silently to oneself.<sup>58</sup> But what do you think? *T.* I think the same. *S.* Thus when anyone thinks one thing to be something else, the fact is that he says to himself that the one is the other. *T.* Well? *S.* Just try to recall if you have ever yet said to yourself that, for instance, beauty is quite certainly ugliness, or justice injustice, or—to sum it up in a word—consider if you have ever tried to convince yourself that of any two things one is the other? Is it not, on the contrary true, that never once even in a dream have you had the hardihood to say to yourself that odd must beyond question be even—or anything else of the sort? *T.* You are right. *S.* And do you think that anyone else, whether mad or sane, dare seriously say to himself—and believe it—that an ox must be a horse; or two, one? <sup>59</sup> *T.* I should think not, indeed. *S.* Very well, then; if to have an opinion is to speak to oneself, no one speaking and thinking about two things, and apprehending both in his mind, could say and think that one was the other. I must ask you to let the word “other” pass.<sup>60</sup> I will put it this way; that no one thinks the ugly is the beautiful, or anything of that kind. *T.* Well, I will let it pass, and I agree with what you say. *S.* If then one thinks of both, one

<sup>58</sup> For the parallel between judgment and speech, see *Philebus*, 38c-e, and *Sophist*, 263e-264b.

<sup>59</sup> The abstract notions, that is. Anyone may think some particular horse to be an ox, or not see the beauty of a statue, or (196a-b) add an odd to an even number, and make the result even, but no one can think a horse in the abstract to be an ox, or beauty in the abstract to be ugliness, and so on.

<sup>60</sup> The meaning of this is that the Greek word for “the one” and “the other” (of two) is the same.

cannot think one to be the other. *T.* So it seems. *S.* And yet if he thinks of one, and not at all of the other, here again he will never think one to be the other. *T.* True; for to do that he would have to apprehend something that was not in his mind at all. *S.* It follows that whether a man thinks of both things, or of one only, "other-thinking" is equally an impossibility. So that the man who tries to define false opinion as "other-thinking" is talking nonsense, and we have not been able to show how false opinion can occur in our minds by this method any more than by the other. *T.* It seems so.

*S.* Nevertheless, Theaetetus, if we cannot show it to be a reality, we shall be forced to make a good many absurd admissions. *T.* And what are they? *S.* I will not tell you until I have looked everywhere for a way out; for I should be ashamed if our difficulties reduced us to such admissions as I mean. However, if we find a loophole, and escape, then indeed we shall be able to speak freely of other people's plight, while safe from ridicule ourselves; but if we are quite nonplussed, we shall be laid in the dust, and lie as helpless as sea-sick passengers for the imperious logic of the argument to spurn us and work its will on us. Now I will tell you where I think I see a track open to our inquiry. *T.* Tell me by all means. 191

## § 11

*S.* I propose to deny the correctness of our conclusion that it is impossible for a man to think what he knows to be what he does not know, and so be in error. Some way or another it must be possible. *T.* Do you mean what I myself suspected at the time, when we declared error to be something like this:—when I, as it may happen, knowing Socrates, but seeing at a distance someone else whom I do not know, think him to be the Socrates I know? For that is certainly such a case as you mean. *S.* Yes, and we abandoned it, did we not, because it made us know something and not know it at the same time? *T.* Certainly. *S.* Well, let us put it in another way, as follows;—it may

prove tractable, or it may be stubborn; but the truth is, we are in such a difficulty that we must turn every possible argument over and over to see if it is sound. Let us see then if I am right. Is it possible for someone who does not know something, to learn it later on? *T.* Assuredly it is. *S.* And the same with a succession of things? *T.* Of course. *S.* Well, I ask you to suppose for the sake of argument that we have in our souls a lump of wax for moulding; some a bigger one, some smaller; some of purer and some of impurer wax; some stiffer, some more plastic, and some of average qualities. *T.* Agreed. *S.* Let us say that it is the gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses, and that in it, whenever we wish to remember something that we see or hear or think to ourselves, we take an impression, holding it under the sensation or idea, as if we were taking the impression of a seal; and that what is so impressed we remember and know, as long as the outline remains there; and when it is obliterated, or the impression cannot be taken, we forget, or do not know. *T.* So be it. *S.* Now see if you think this is how a man who is hearing or seeing objects that he knows, can look at them in such a way as to arrive at a false opinion. *T.* How? *S.* Thinking, that is, what he knows, sometimes to be what he knows, and sometimes to be what he does not know. For this is what we previously agreed, without good reason, to be impossible. *T.* Then what do you say about it now? <sup>61</sup>

192 *S.* We must look at it in this way; and begin by mak-

<sup>61</sup> The attempt is now made to explain error as arising "in the application of sensation to thought" (195*d-e*), the adjustment of a present perception to the memory of a past perception "so that recognition may take place" (193*c*). This apparently evades the difficulty of "knowing what one does not know" by allowing both factors to be "known" (sensation and memory being equally regarded as "knowledge"), but supposing a false relation to be established between them. Of course, this is only a subterfuge, for they cannot be "known" except in their true relation. The explanation is allowed to stand until it is shown (196*b-c*) that error also occurs when one is dealing with ideas only, in which case it becomes evident that we are again assuming the possibility of "knowing" and "not-knowing" at the same time.

ing certain distinctions. What a man knows, and has the record of it in his soul, but does not perceive it, he cannot possibly think to be something else that he knows, and has recorded, and does not perceive. Nor can he think what he knows, to be something he does not know, and has no record of it; nor what he does not know, to be what he equally does not know; nor what he does not know, to be what he knows; nor what he perceives, to be something else that he perceives; nor what he does not perceive, to be something else that he does not perceive; nor what he does not perceive, to be something that he perceives. And further, to think that something he knows and perceives and has the record of it applied to the sensation, is something else that he knows and perceives, and has its record applied also—this is, if possible, still more out of the question. Nor can he think what he knows and perceives and has its record at hand, to be something else that he knows; nor what he knows and perceives and has the record as before, to be something else that he perceives; nor what he neither knows nor perceives, to be what he neither knows nor perceives; nor what he neither knows nor perceives, to be what he does not know; nor what he neither knows nor perceives, to be what he does not perceive. In all these cases the impossibility of false opinion is transcendent. It remains then for it to occur, if anywhere, in the following cases. *T.* Well, and what are they?—perhaps they may give me some clue; for at present I do not follow at all. *S.* When a man thinks something he knows to be something else he knows and perceives; or something he does not know, but perceives; or that something he knows and perceives is something else that he knows and perceives. *T.* Now I am left farther behind than ever. *S.* Then let me put it to you again in this way. I, knowing Theodorus, and remembering his appearance in my mind, and Theaetetus in the same way, see them sometimes, and sometimes not, and touch them now, and now do not, and hear them or perceive them by some other sense at one time, and at another time have no sensation of you at all, but none the less remember you and know you in my own mind. Is it not so? *T.* Certainly. *S.* This then you must understand to be my first point, namely—

that one may perceive or not perceive what one knows.

*T.* True. *S.* And what one does not know is often not perceived either, and often perceived without being known.

*T.* That is so, too. *S.* See then if you follow any better  
 193 now:—Socrates knows Theodorus and Theaetetus, but sees neither of them nor perceives them in any other way: then he can never think to himself that Theaetetus is Theodorus. Am I right, or not? *T.* Quite right. *S.* Now this was the first of the cases I was mentioning. *T.* It was. *S.* The second was—knowing one of you, but not knowing the other, and perceiving neither, I could never think the man I know to be the man I do not know. *T.* Quite right. *S.* And thirdly, knowing neither and perceiving neither, I could never think a man I do not know, to be someone else whom I also do not know. Take it, in short, that I have repeated all the cases I mentioned in order—the cases, that is, in which I could never have a false opinion about you and Theodorus, whether knowing both, or neither, or knowing one and not knowing the other; and the same as regards perception—if you follow me. *T.* I follow.

*S.* It remains then for false opinion to occur in the following circumstances: when, that is, knowing you and Theodorus, and having the impression of both of you like the impression of a seal in the waxen lump I described, seeing you both far off and not quite clearly, I try to apply the right impression of each to the right vision, and to fit the vision into its own mould, so that recognition may take place; but I fail in my endeavour and transpose them, applying the image of one to the impression of the other, like people who put their shoes on the wrong feet, or like the effect of a mirror on sight, when right is turned to left. It is when such a blunder is made that “other-thinking” and false opinion comes about. *T.* The comparison is very apt, Socrates; you seem to have described exactly what happens to opinion. *S.* And further when I know both, and perceive one also, but not the other, and have not my knowledge of the former fitted to the sensation—which was the case I put before, and you did not understand it at the time. . . . *T.* No, I did not. *S.* . . . Well, I was saying that a man

knowing another, and perceiving him, and having his knowledge fitted to his sensation, will never think him to be someone else whom he knows and perceives and has the knowledge of him, too, fitted to the sensation. This was the case described, was it not? *T.* Yes. *S.* Yes, but we omitted the present case, in which we hold that false opinion does arise—namely, when a man knowing both and seeing both, or having some other perception of them, has not each impression against its proper sensation, but like a poor bowman shoots beside the mark and misses; which is just what is called error. *T.* Naturally. *S.* And when, too, the sensation corresponding to one only of the two impressions is present, and he fits the record of the absent sensation to the present one—in all such cases the mind errs. To sum up, in the case of that which one does not know and has never perceived, error and false opinion are evidently impossible, if our present argument is sound: but it is in the case of things we both know and perceive that opinion turns and twists between true and false; true, when it adjusts the proper impressions and the moulds and in a straight line, and false when it does so sideways and crookedly. *T.* Surely an admirable explanation, Socrates?

*S.* Well, you will say so still more, when you have heard the rest; for true opinion is indeed admirable, and false disgraceful. *T.* No doubt. *S.* Now, they say that they arise in the following way. When the wax in a man's mind is deep and plentiful and smooth and fitly kneaded, the images that come through the senses and are stamped off on the "soul's core," as Homer called it, hinting at the likeness to wax,<sup>62</sup>—then, and in such cases, I say, the impressions being clearly taken and with a sufficient depth are lasting, and such men are not only quick at learning but have good memories, and true opinions, as they do not fit the impressions wrongly to the sensations; for the impressions are clear, and not crowded, so that they can speedily distribute the real objects, as we call them,<sup>63</sup> each to

<sup>62</sup> What Homer says is the "heart" (*kēar*) "of the soul," which is fancifully explained as an allusion to wax (*kēros*).

<sup>63</sup> The Greek here is confused, and the exact meaning doubtful; nor is it clear why it should be necessary to refer to



its proper impression ; and such men are called wise. Does it seem so to you? *T.* Emphatically. *S.* But when a man's heart is rugged (a thing indeed which the all-wise poet praised) or muddy, and the wax of it not pure, or too soft, or too hard—those who have it soft are quick at learning, but forgetful, and those who have it hard are the opposite ; while those who have it rough and rugged, with stones in it, or full of soil or mud that is mixed with it, receive the impressions indistinctly. They are indistinct, too, where the wax is hard, for there is no depth in them ; and equally so when it is soft, for the wax runs together, and the impressions soon become blurred. But if in addition the impressions are crowded one over another for want of space, when a man has a little slip of a soul, they are more indistinct than ever. All such men then are inclined to false opinions. For when they see or hear or think of anything, they cannot quickly sort out the right impression to the right sensation, and are consequently slow and make wrong connexions, so that for the most part they see and hear and think amiss. And it is these men who are described as mistaking the reality, and stupid. *T.* Nothing could be more accurate, Socrates. *S.* Shall we say then that there are such things as false opinions in us? *T.* Most assuredly. *S.* And true also, no doubt? *T.* And true, too. *S.* Then in our opinion we have satisfactorily established the certain existence of these two kinds of opinion. *T.* Absolutely so.

## § 12

*S.* Theaetetus, what a truly dreadful and uncomfortable thing is a man who is fond of chattering! *T.* Why, what do you mean now? *S.* I am annoyed to think how slow of apprehension and what a chatterbox I am. For what else can one call it, when a man worries a question up and

“ what are called things that are ” (the literal meaning). Indeed, as the words spoil the sentence, I think they must be spurious, and inserted by a copyist to explain the reference to “ reality ” at the end of Socrates' next speech.

down out of stupidity, because he cannot be convinced, and can hardly be got to let a single subject drop? *T.* But what is it that annoys you? *S.* I am not only annoyed; I am positively afraid that if anyone were to say to me, "Well, Socrates, have you discovered false opinion and ascertained that it occurs neither in the relations of sensation to sensation, nor in those of thought to thought, but in the conjunction of sensation and thought?"—I should say "yes," should I not, with a smirk of satisfaction, as if we had made some magnificent discovery?<sup>64</sup> *T.* I certainly think, Socrates, that what has just been demonstrated is by no means contemptible. *S.* "Well," he will say, "you hold, I suppose, that when we merely think of a man without seeing him, we could never imagine him to be a horse which also we neither see nor touch, but only think of it, without having any other perception of it?" I shall reply, I presume, that this is our meaning? *T.* Yes, and rightly. *S.* "Then," he will say, "according to this argument, a man could never imagine that eleven, of which he is merely thinking, is twelve, of which also he is merely thinking?" Come now, answer this question yourself. *T.* Well, my answer will be that when a man goes by sight or hearing he may imagine eleven to be twelve; but when he is merely thinking of them, he could never imagine it to be so. *S.* Now, do you think that a man who has put before his mind seven and five—and I do not mean seven and five men, or anything of that sort, but five and 196 seven in the abstract, the records, as we conceive them, in the waxen lump, in dealing with which false opinion is, according to us, impossible—do you suppose that a man has never, by chance, considered these, and asked himself how many they are, and thought and said they were eleven; and another man twelve; or do all say and think they are

<sup>64</sup> The preceding explanation might have been shown to imply, as it stands, that one can know what one does not know, and *vice versa* (if, that is, one assumes sensation and thought to be respectively forms of "knowing"); but Plato is content to show that it omits the case of error in thought alone, and that here a coincidence of knowing and not-knowing, in the form of a failure to recognise in one shape what one can recognise in another, does, in fact, occur.

twelve? <sup>65</sup> *T.* No, most certainly not. Many would say they were eleven; and the larger the number investigated, the more likely one is to go wrong;—for I imagine you are speaking about all number in general. *S.* Quite right; and I want you to consider whether what happens in such cases is not simply that the man thinks the impression of eleven in the wax, to be twelve? *T.* It seems so. *S.* Then we come back, do we not, to our first argument? For the man to whom this happens thinks something that he knows to be something else that he also knows; which we declared to be impossible, and used the impossibility to disprove the existence of false opinion, because it would make a man know and not know the same thing at the same time. *T.* Quite true. *S.* Then we must find another definition of false opinion than the imperfect application of thought to sensation; for if it were this, we should never be in error in thought alone. But as it is, either there is no such thing as false opinion, or it is possible to know and not to know at the same time. *T.* A desperate choice, Socrates. *S.* Yes, but the argument, it seems, will not allow both. Still, since we must shrink from nothing, what if we were to cast shame to the winds? *T.* How? *S.* By taking it on ourselves to say what knowing is. *T.* And why is that shameless? *S.* You seem to forget that our whole discussion from the

<sup>65</sup> The argument is here a little difficult to follow. The preceding explanation of the process of error assumed that it only occurred in the incorrect reference of something given by sense to something already in the mind. It is now shown that it can occur in the mind also:—one can add up numbers incorrectly in one's head. The explanation, therefore, falls to the ground, in so far as it is incomplete. It is not shown that it is wrong as it stands—only that it omits to account for certain phenomena. But instead of attempting to reconstruct it, Plato takes the case of error in the mind, argues that it is a case of “not knowing what one knows,” and proceeds to develop a wholly new explanation.—There is an evident fallacy in the argument that to think  $7 + 5 = 11$  is not to know what one knows. The assumption is that  $7 + 5$  and 12 are identical notions, which is clearly not the case. It is curious that the proposition  $7 + 5 = 12$  is that chosen by Kant as an example of a “synthetic judgment *a priori*,”—synthetic, as opposed to analytic, because it is not a mere statement of identity; for the predicate contains something that is not given in the subject.

start has been a search after knowledge, on the assumption that we do not know what it is. *T.* I do not forget it. *S.* And you do not think it shameless, when we are ignorant of knowledge, to explain what knowing means? But to tell the truth, Theaetetus, our whole discussion has been full of irregularities for some time. For we have said times without number "we know" and "we do not know" and "understand" and "do not understand," as we if comprehended each other's meaning, when all the while we are wholly ignorant of what knowledge is: nay—if you please—we have this very moment used the words "ignorant" and "comprehend," as if we had any right to do so when knowledge is out of our reach. *T.* But how will you talk, Socrates, if you do not use these words? *S.* No way at all, being what I am: but I might, if I were 197 a quibbler;—for if such a man were indeed here, he would bid us refrain from all such words, and rate us soundly for the errors I mentioned. However, as we are but poor creatures, shall I make bold to say what knowing is? For it seems to me that it would be an assistance to us. *T.* Then make the venture, by all means, and we will freely pardon you for using the forbidden words.<sup>66</sup>

*S.* Well, have you heard what some people say that

<sup>66</sup> All this transitional passage is confused. The true sequence seems to be this:—It has so far been tacitly assumed that to have a notion in one's mind is to know it: but if so, it would be impossible to be in error when dealing with notions only; whereas we find it, in fact, to be possible: therefore it must be shown how one can have a notion in one's mind without knowing it. But as it stands the passage is inconsequent. Socrates proposes, as if it were a new thing, to describe the process of knowing. But the process has already been described in one way by the figure of the waxen lump. And the objection which he proceeds, not very consistently, to make to the preceding discussion—viz. that a definition of knowledge has been presupposed throughout (and that, therefore, it is evidently premature to discuss error before knowledge)—leads naturally to a renewal of the direct inquiry, which, however, only follows, *after a repetition of the objection*, at 200d. I can only conclude that (as I have suggested in the *Introduction*) the whole episode of "the dove-cote" is a later insertion. It will be seen that the discussion indicates in some places a more advanced stage of thought than is reached in the main portion of the dialogue.

knowing is? *T.* Very possibly, but I do not recall it at the moment. *S.* They say, I believe, that it means to have knowledge. *T.* True. *S.* Now let us make a slight change and say that it is the possession of knowledge. *T.* Why, what distinction will you make between the two? *S.* None, perhaps: but let me tell you what I think, and help me to examine it. *T.* Yes, if I can. *S.* I do not think that having is the same as possessing. If, for instance, a man has bought a cloak, and it is his own, but he does not wear it, we should not say that he has it, but that he possesses it. *T.* Yes; quite right. *S.* Now consider if it is not possible in the same way to possess knowledge without having it; just as if a man had snared some wild birds, doves or others, and kept them in a dovecote he had built at home. For in one way we should say that he always has them, since he possesses them; should we not? *T.* Yes. *S.* But in another way that he has none of them; yet since he has them under his hand in an enclosure of his own, he has the power<sup>67</sup> of holding and having them when he wishes, catching whichever he wants and letting it go again; and this he can do as often as he thinks fit. *T.* That is so.

*S.* Once again, then, just as, a short while ago, we were constructing in the mind a sort of waxwork, let us now, as it were, frame in each man's soul a dovecote of all manner of birds, some in flocks apart from the others, and some in small detachments, and some flying about anywhere and everywhere by themselves.<sup>68</sup> *T.* Let us suppose it made. What follows? *S.* When we are children, we must suppose that the receptacle is empty—and by the birds we must understand knowledges; and whatever knowledge

<sup>67</sup> This is probably the first appearance in philosophy of the notion of potentiality, which was one of Aristotle's cardinal principles, and is the basis of the notion of evolution, the development of what is potential into actuality. The conception of knowledge (in the psychological sense) as a potentiality belongs to the same order of ideas as the conception of existence as the potentiality of acting and being acted upon, in the *Sophist* (247 d-e).

<sup>68</sup> The third class is evidently introduced to represent the categories—another sign of lateness.



is acquired and shut up in the enclosure we must say the child has learned, or has discovered the object to which the knowledge relates; and that this is knowing. *T.* Very well. *S.* Now when he catches any knowledge he wants over again, and holds it in his hand, and again lets it go, what names ought we to give to these actions?—the same as before, when he first acquired the knowledge, or others? You will understand better by an example. There is, is there not, an art of numbers? *T.* Yes. *S.* Consider this as a chase after the knowledges of every form of odd and even. *T.* I have it. *S.* It is by this art, I apprehend, that a man has the knowledges of numbers within his reach, and can transmit them when necessary to others. *T.* Yes. *S.* And we say that the man who transmits them teaches, and the man who receives them learns; and whoever has them, in the sense of possessing them in the dove-cote, knows them. *T.* Certainly.

*S.* Now attend closely to what follows from this. A complete arithmetician knows, does he not, all numbers; for the knowledges of all numbers are in his mind? *T.* Well? *S.* May not such a man count something either in his own mind, or something external that has number? *T.* Of course. *S.* And counting, we agree, is simply investigating how much a number is. *T.* Quite so. *S.* Then we find him investigating what he knows, as if he were ignorant of it, though we began by assuming that he knew all numbers. You have heard such quibbles, I suppose? *T.* Yes, I have. *S.* Now shall we not compare it with the possession and recapture of the doves, and say that there was a double chase; one before the acquisition, in order to acquire it, and the other after possession, for the purpose of having in his hand what was already long acquired? In this way it is possible for a man to learn over again what he had learned long ago, and had the knowledge of it in his mind,—that is, he seizes again and holds in his hand the knowledge of each thing, which he had acquired in the past, but did not have it ready at the moment in his mind. *T.* True. *S.* Now what I was asking just now is this: what terms ought one to choose to describe what takes place when the



arithmetician proceeds to count, or the grammarian to read ; for you see that in such a case he knows, and yet proceeds to learn again from himself what he knows already. *T.* But that is very strange, Socrates. *S.* Yes, but we can hardly say that he will read or count what he does not know, when we have assumed him to have the knowledge  
 199 of all letters or all numbers. *T.* No, that would be unreasonable, too. *S.* Well, shall we say that the names are nothing to us ; and anyone may twist “ knowing ” and “ learning ” about as he likes : but now that we have established a distinction between possessing and having knowledge, we can see, can we not, that what a man possesses, it is impossible for him not to possess, so that he can never not know what he knows, but at the same time can conceive a false opinion about it ? For it is possible for him to have in his hand not the knowledge of the thing he wants, but some other knowledge instead, if, when he is hunting up some particular knowledge from his stock,<sup>69</sup> others fly in the way and he takes one by mistake for another ; as, for example, when he thought that eleven was twelve, having caught the knowledge of eleven in his mind instead of the knowledge of twelve, as it were a ringdove instead of a pigeon. *T.* That certainly seems reasonable. *S.* But when he catches the one he meant to catch, then he avoids error, and has an opinion in accordance with the reality ; so that in this way both true and false opinion are possible, and we avoid all our previous objections. Perhaps you agree with me ; or do you not ? *T.* I agree.

*S.* Yes, for we have got rid of the difficulty of making a man not know what he does know, since there is now no case in which we are represented as not possessing what we do possess, whether we make a mistake or not.—But I think I see glimpses of a worse difficulty still. *T.* What is that ? *S.* Whether it can really be possible that the interchange of knowledges will ever result in false opinion. *T.* How do you mean ? *S.* I mean, first, that a man, having the knowledge of something in his hand, should be ignorant of that very

<sup>69</sup> Campbell.

thing, not in virtue of ignorance but by his very knowledge ; and in the next place that he should think that to be something else, and something else, that ? <sup>70</sup> Is it not perfectly unreasonable that, with knowledge actually present in it, the mind should know nothing, and be ignorant of everything ? For on the same showing there is nothing to prevent the presence of ignorance from making a man know something, or blindness from making him see, if knowledge is ever going to make him ignorant.

*T.* Perhaps, Socrates, the reason is that we were wrong in making the birds knowledges only, and we ought to have assumed ignorances, too, flying about in the mind together with knowledges, so that the man who tried to catch one would sometimes catch a knowledge and sometimes an ignorance, and think falsely with the ignorance, and truly with the knowledge, about one and the same thing. *S.* It is difficult not to praise you, Theaetetus ; but just look again at what you have said. Let us suppose it is as you suggest : then the man who catches an ignorance will have a false opinion, 200 according to you, will he not ? *T.* Yes. *S.* But I suppose he will not think his opinion to be false ? *T.* Of course not. *S.* No, he will think it true, and his attitude towards the object of his false opinion will be the same as if he knew it. *T.* Well ? *S.* He will think, then, that he has caught and has in his hand a knowledge, and not an ignorance. *T.* Evidently. *S.* Then we have gone a long way round only to find ourselves at the old difficulty again. For our friend the adept at argument will burst out laughing and say, " My good people, do you mean that a man knows both a knowledge and an ignorance, and thinks one

<sup>70</sup> On this theory a man says  $7+5=11$  because he gets hold of the notion of eleven instead of that of twelve. It is his knowledge of eleven, in fact, that makes him ignorant of twelve—a supposition which is dismissed as absurd without further argument. The truth is that, however many stages are introduced in the process of judgment, in the end the predicate has to be affirmed of the subject, and the predicate being (on the assumption that is made throughout) something that is known, it cannot be wrongly affirmed unless it is possible not to know what one knows.

that he knows is another that he also knows ; or that he knows neither, and thinks one that he does not know, to be another that he does not know either ; or that he knows one and not the other, and thinks the one he knows, to be the one he does not know ; or thinks the one he does not know, to be the one he knows ? Or will you proceed to tell me that there are other knowledges of these knowledges and ignorances, which a man possesses and has them shut up in some other ridiculous dovecotes or waxen lumps, and knows them so long as he possesses them, even though he has not got them to hand in his mind—with the result that you will be compelled to go round and round to the same point ten thousand times and never get any farther ? <sup>71</sup> What shall we say in answer to this, Theaetetus ? *T.* Upon my soul, Socrates, I do not know what to say. *S.* Then it may be, my boy, that the rebuke is deserved, and the argument shows that we were wrong in investigating false opinion first, to the exclusion of knowledge, whereas it is impossible to know what false opinion is, until the nature of knowledge has been satisfactorily ascertained. *T.* As things are, Socrates, I can only agree with what you say.

### § 13

*S.* Then, to begin again from the beginning, what are we to say that knowledge is ? For I imagine that we will not give up just yet. *T.* Certainly not, unless you do so yourself. *S.* Well, tell me how we can define it with the least risk of contradicting ourselves. *T.* By what we proposed before, Socrates ; for I at anyrate can think of nothing else. *S.* And what was that ? *T.* That true

<sup>71</sup> See the preceding note. Plato's real explanation of the difficulties that have been felt would be that the notion of knowledge in the strict sense is, in fact, wholly inapplicable to the phenomena that we have been investigating. It has been assumed that merely, so to say, to have a thing in one's head is to know it, and the upshot of the whole discussion is to show by a *reductio ad absurdum* that this assumption is unsound. See the *Excursus*, II. — The trenchant proof that these mechanical theories merely raise the original question again *ad infinitum* is in the style more of Part III. than of Part II.

opinion is knowledge. For true opinion is surely safe from error, and its products are always fair and good. *S.* The man who was telling the way across the river, Theaetetus, said the result would show; and if we go on and explore your definition, perhaps we may stumble unawares on the very object of our search; but we shall certainly discover nothing if we stay where we are. *T.* You are right; let us go on and investigate it. *S.* Well, this at any rate will not require much investigation; for there is a whole art which proves that it is not knowledge. *T.* How? What is the art? *S.* The art of those wisest among mortals whom men call orators and lawyers; for these persuade others by their art, do they not, without actually teaching them, but by making them have any opinions that they wish them to have? Or do you think there are any teachers so clever, that, during the flow of a little water in the clock, they can adequately teach people to know the truth of what happened to others who were robbed of money or otherwise assaulted, when their hearers were not present at the time? *T.* No, I certainly think they do not teach them, but only persuade them. *S.* And by persuading do you not mean causing them to have an opinion? *T.* Yes; what then? *S.* Then when the jurors are rightly persuaded of something one could not actually know except by being present—when they judge it, that is, on hearsay, and yet with a true opinion, they judge it without knowledge; even though, if their decision is sound, their persuasion is correct. *T.* Certainly. *S.* Now if true opinion and knowledge were identical, the cleverest juryman could never have a right opinion without knowledge. We see then that they must be different.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> It is certainly disconcerting when one has at last come to realise, after a long and difficult course of reasoning, that knowledge cannot be explained merely as the correct recognition of an object, to find that the conclusion is not drawn at all, but that an entirely new argument—an argument, too, of a very obvious and superficial kind—is introduced, and the definition dismissed without more ado. If this is all, why were we not told so ten pages ago? But Plato likes to disguise the real reason that is in his mind, and put the reader off with another that is evidently insufficient.

## III

## THE PART AND THE WHOLE

## § 14

*T.* YES,—I once heard the distinction explained by someone and had forgotten it ; but now it comes into my mind. He said that true opinion, if accompanied by a reason, was knowledge, and without a reason was not knowledge : and further, that things which admit of no reasoned statement are not knowable (that was the word he used) and those which do are knowable. *S.* Excellent indeed. And how did he distinguish the knowable from the unknowable ? Tell me, so that I may see if we have both heard the same story. *T.* I do not know if I could recall it ; but I think I could follow, if someone else told me. *S.* Hear then “a dream for a dream.”<sup>73</sup> For I, too, seem to have heard people saying that the primary elements, so to call them, of which we and the rest of things are built up, admit of no reasoned statement. Each by itself one can only name, and cannot say anything else about it at all, either that it is, or that it  
 202 is not ; for that would at once be to add being or not-being to it, whereas one must add nothing, if one is to speak of it quite by itself. Indeed neither “itself” nor “it” nor

<sup>73</sup> The following discussion is wholly different both in matter and manner from that which has preceded it. The argument is intricate and concise, closely reasoned and subtle. The question is whether any addition of elements drawn from perception can convert into knowledge the recognition of an object which we have seen not to be knowledge in itself. Or it may be put in this way : correct perception evidently requires some basis of reason to make it certain ; one must not only recognise an object but have some reason which makes us sure that it is what we think it to be : can this reason (*logos*, which I have translated as “reasoned statement,” to cover as far as possible the different senses in which it is used)—can this necessary basis be supplied from experience ? (See further the *Excursus*, p. 100.)—Who is the theorist whose views Plato takes as material for his argument, is not certainly known. He is generally supposed



“each” nor “alone” nor “this” ought properly to be applied to it, nor any of the many other such words: for these terms which circulate about and are applied to all things indiscriminately are something other than the things to which they are applied; whereas we ought—if it were possible for the element to be spoken, and it had a phrase peculiar to itself—to speak of it by that phrase alone, without any addition whatever. However, it is in fact impossible for any of the primaries to be expressed in a sentence; it can only be named, for a name is all that it has. But when we come to the objects into which the primaries are combined, the names of the elements are connected together, just as they are themselves; for the essence of speech is a connexion together of names. Thus we see that the elements admit of no reasoned statement, and cannot be known, but only perceived; while the combinations are knowable, and may be spoken, and made the objects of true opinion. When therefore anyone conceives a true opinion of anything without a reasoned statement, his mind is free from error about it, but does not know it; for the man who cannot give and accept a reasoned statement about anything, has not knowledge of it: but when he adds to his true opinion a reasoned statement, he has in addition all that is required to constitute knowledge. Is that the form in which you heard the dream, or how? *T.* That was it exactly. *S.* Do you accept it then, and lay it down that a true opinion with a reasoned statement is knowledge? *T.* Certainly.

*S.* Can it be, Theaetetus, that here and now we have at last happened on the very thing that many

to be Antisthenes. Dr Jackson (*J. of Phil.*, xiii., pp. 262-265) distinguishes between the theory that elements are unknowable and complexes knowable which he allows to Antisthenes, and the theory that knowledge is “true opinion combined with a reasoned statement,” which he holds to be meant for the Socratic theory of knowledge. If my interpretation of the intention of the whole section is sound, it is evidently impossible that Plato can have been thinking of Socrates, because what is criticised is a theory on which knowledge is purely empirical; and it was precisely the “Socratic concept” that first led Plato to the view that knowledge is *a priori*.



sages have grown old in seeking without avail? *T.* It certainly seems to me, Socrates, that the present explanation is a good one. *S.* Indeed you may well say so; for what knowledge could there be at all without a reasoned statement,<sup>74</sup> and right opinion? But there is one point in what we have said that I do not quite like. *T.* What is that? *S.* Just what appears to be the neatest part of the whole theory—I mean the statement that the elements are unknowable, but the class of composites knowable. *T.* Is it not correct? *S.* That is what we must ascertain. As it happens we have hostages, so to say, in the examples which the author of the theory used. *T.* What do you mean? *S.* The letters of the alphabet and syllables. Do you not agree that this is what the man whose views we have been expounding must have had in his mind?<sup>75</sup> *T.* Yes, it must have been so.

203 *S.* Let us take them, then, and examine them; or rather, let us examine ourselves, and ask whether it was in this way or not that we learned our letters. To begin with—is it the case that the syllables admit of a reasoned statement, and the letters of none? *T.* Possibly. *S.* Nay, it certainly seems to me to be so. At any rate, suppose one were to ask you a question about the first syllable of the name Socrates, and say “Theaetetus, tell me what SO is,” what would you answer? *T.* That it is S and O. *S.* Well, have you not there the reasoned statement of the syllable? *T.* Yes, certainly. *S.* Proceed, then, and give me in the same way the reasoned statement of S. *T.* But how can one give the elements of an element? For, indeed, Socrates, S is one of the voiceless letters, a mere sound, as it were a whistling of the tongue. B again has neither voice nor sound, nor have most of the letters; so that it seems quite reasonable to say that they admit

<sup>74</sup> This, it must be understood, Plato himself holds. To know anything is to understand its *logos*. But what he is about to prove is that this *logos* is not given in experience.

<sup>75</sup> The Greek words for “element” and “letter of the alphabet,” and for “syllable” and “combination,” are respectively the same (*stoicheion* and *sullabê*), and it is occasionally impossible in the succeeding passage to say which meaning is uppermost.

of no statement, seeing that the seven that are the most distinct of them are no more than vocal, and have no articulate speech in them.<sup>76</sup> *S.* Here then we have arrived at a true account of knowledge. *T.* Apparently.

### § 15

*S.* But stay, I wonder if we are right in laying it down that while the element is not knowable the combination is? *T.* It seems probable. *S.* Let us see then: are we to say that the syllable is both the letters—or all, if they are more than two—or a single form resulting from the combination of them? *T.* I think we should say it is all of them. *S.* Take the case of two—S and O. Both together make the first syllable of my name. Now does the man who knows the syllable know both of them? *T.* Yes; what then? *S.* He knows, then, S and O together. *T.* Yes. *S.* What, and is he ignorant of each separately? Can he know neither and yet know both? *T.* That would be strange beyond all reason, Socrates. *S.* Nevertheless, if it is necessary to know each in order to know both, it is indispensable for the man who wishes to know a combination to know all the elements beforehand; and off runs our fine theory. *T.* And very suddenly, too!

*S.* That is because we do not keep an eye on it as we should. Perhaps we ought to have taken the combination to be not the sum of the elements, but a single form resulting from them, with an individual shape of its own, and differing from the elements. *T.* Certainly; very possibly this view is more correct than the other. *S.* We must look into it, and not give up a great and imposing doctrine so tamely. *T.* By no means. *S.* Then let the combination be, as we now put it, a single form, alike in letters and in everything else, resulting from the conjunction of har- 204

<sup>76</sup> This is another of those unexpected displays of erudition on the part of Theaetetus which are peculiar to the later parts of the dialogue. Moreover, it evidently belongs to a time when Plato was interested in the classification of the alphabet—i.e. to the period in which he wrote *Philebus*, 18b-d.

monious elements in each case.<sup>77</sup> *T.* Certainly. *S.* It follows that it must not have parts. *T.* Why? *S.* Because if a thing has parts, the whole must necessarily be the sum of the parts.<sup>78</sup> Or do you perhaps hold that the whole is a single form resulting from the parts and different from the sum of them? *T.* I do. *S.* Well, do you call the whole and the totality the same thing or different? *T.* I am not quite clear about it; but as you bade me answer with a will, I say at a venture—different. *S.* The spirit is right, Theaetetus; let us see if the answer is so, too. *T.* Let us by all means.

*S.* The whole then differs from the totality, that is what now is advanced? *T.* Yes. *S.* Well, then; is there any difference between the totality and the sum of the parts? As for instance, when we say "one, two, three, four, five, six," or "twice three," or "thrice two," or "four and two," or "three and two and one"—in all these cases do we say the same thing or not? *T.* The same. *S.* That is, six? *T.* Certainly. *S.* And have we not each time named all the six units? *T.* Yes. *S.* And on the other hand when we name them all, do we not at the same time name a single thing? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* And that is precisely the number six? *T.* Certainly. *S.* Then in the case of all things made up of numbers we give the same name to the totality and the sum of the

<sup>77</sup> Note that this is precisely Plato's own conception. The reality of any individual thing—a flower, a city, or (as in the *Philebus*) the human character—is a single form (the same expression as was used (184*d*) to express the unity of the ego) resulting from the harmonious combination of the appropriate elements. Only this single form cannot be cognised *a posteriori*.

<sup>78</sup> The succeeding passage, which is not really necessary to the argument, evidently belongs to the period in which Plato wrote the *Parmenides*, which mainly consist of the most abstract analyses of general notions.—In Greek the distinctions are far neater and more precise. What I have translated as "the sum of the parts" is simply *panta*, the neuter plural of "all"; while "the totality" is *pân*, the neuter singular.—The alternatives, that a thing must be merely the sum of its parts or partless, are not in reality (or in Plato's view) mutually exclusive. The "single form" is a particular arrangement of parts, something more than their sum, and yet consisting of them. But this is not given empirically.

parts. *T.* Apparently. *S.* Well, let us look at them in this way. The numerical expression for the acre and the acre is the same thing, is it not? *T.* Yes. *S.* And the same in the case of a furlong? *T.* Yes. *S.* And further the number of an army and the army—and all such things in like manner? For the total number is the total actual thing in each case? *T.* Yes. *S.* But the number of each is nothing but its parts? *T.* No. *S.* Whatever then has parts, is made up of parts. *T.* Apparently. *S.* But if the totality is the numerical sum, it follows that it is the sum of the parts. *T.* Yes. *S.* The whole, therefore, does not consist of the parts; for if it were the sum of the parts, it would be the totality. *T.* Apparently so. *S.* But is a part what it is in relation to anything but the whole? *T.* Yes, in relation to the totality. *S.* You make a brave fight of it, Theaetetus! But is not the totality a totality precisely when nothing is absent from it? *T.* Necessarily. *S.* And is not the whole also precisely that from which nothing is anywhere absent? And does not that from which anything is taken away cease simultaneously to be the totality and the whole, the effect being identical in both cases? *T.* It seems now that there is no difference between the whole and the totality.<sup>79</sup>

*S.* Well, were we not saying that in the case of anything that has parts the whole and the totality of it will be the sum of the parts? *T.* Certainly. *S.* To resume, then, what I was trying to show:—if the combination is not the elements, is it not necessary either that it contains the elements otherwise than as parts of itself, or that, being identical with the sum of them, it is equally knowable with them? *T.* That is so. *S.* Now was it not precisely to avoid this that we made it different from them? *T.* Yes. *S.* What then? If the letters are not parts of the syllable can you name any other things which are parts

<sup>79</sup> The argument is briefly this:—The totality is the sum of the parts, and therefore consists of the parts; if, then, the whole is not the totality, it does not consist of the parts; which is absurd, since a part is a part of the whole; therefore the whole is the totality.

of it and yet not elements of it? *T.* No I cannot; for if, Socrates, I were to admit that it had parts, it would surely be ridiculous to look for them elsewhere than in the letters. *S.* Then everything goes to show, according to our present argument, that a combination must be taken as a single indivisible form. *T.* So it seems.

*S.* Now do you remember, my friend, that a little while ago we accepted it as a fair proposition, that the primaries from which other things are built up did not admit of a reasoned statement, because each was an individual, uncompounded whole, and that it was not even permissible to apply the term "being" to it, nor even "this," because such terms were something other than it, and alien to it, and that this was what made it incapable of being stated or known? *T.* I remember. *S.* Well is not precisely this the cause of its being a singular and indivisible entity? I at any rate see no other.<sup>80</sup> *T.* Apparently there is none. *S.* Then the combination has fallen into the same category as the elements, since it has no parts and is an individual form? *T.* Certainly. *S.* If then the combination is merely a number of elements, and a whole of which they are parts, combination and element can equally be known and stated, since we found that the sum of the parts was the same thing as the whole. *T.* Quite so. *S.* But if it is singular, and has no parts, the combination no less than the element is incapable of being stated or known, the same cause producing the same result in both cases. *T.* I am bound to agree.

206 *S.* Then we must not accept any theory which declares that the combination can be known, and stated, but not the element. *T.* No, if we accept this reasoning. *S.* Nay more, would you not rather be inclined to agree with the opposite theory, judging by what you know of your own experiences in learning letters? *T.* What do you mean? *S.* I mean that you spent the whole time learning the letters by themselves, trying to distinguish each separately by eye and by ear, in order that their position in a word might not

<sup>80</sup> A very singular way of putting the matter. In reality it was the indivisibility of the element that made it unknowable, as Socrates has just said. Probably the text is unsound.

confuse you when they were spoken or written? *T.* Quite true. *S.* And at the harpists' school did not the completion of one's education consist in the ability to follow each note and tell to what string it belonged—the notes being, by general admission, the elements of music? *T.* It was. *S.* If then we may make a general inference from the elements and combinations with which we are ourselves familiar, we must conclude that the class of elements forms a much clearer and more fundamental object of knowledge than the combination, if one is to get a firm grasp of a subject; and when anyone declares the combination to be essentially knowable, and the element essentially unknowable, we can only regard him as, intentionally or unintentionally, talking nonsense. *T.* Exactly.

## § 16

*S.* There are other ways, too, I think, in which the same conclusion might be established. However, we must not be led into forgetting our present inquiry; which is, to determine what is meant by saying that the addition of a reasoned statement to true opinion constitutes the completest knowledge.<sup>81</sup> *T.* Let us proceed, then. *S.* Come then, what is it that is meant by the term "reasoned statement"? It must mean, it seems to me, one of three things. *T.* And what are they? *S.* The first would be the expression of one's thoughts aloud by words and phrases, when a man reflects his opinion in the stream of speech, as it were in a mirror or in water. Do you not think that that is a form of reasoned statement? *T.* I do; we

<sup>81</sup> It has been shown that any theory which explains knowledge by supposing that the parts and the whole stand, so to say, on a different plane of cognisability is untenable—untenable, that is, so long as knowledge is assumed to be a *posteriori*, to rest wholly on the basis of what is given to us in experience. It is now assumed that the cognition of part and of whole is of one and the same type; and the question is: Can any observation of the constituents of an object, or of its specific difference from other objects, give to correct perception (or recognition) the certainty which will convert it into knowledge? The natural order of the discussions is inverted—why, it is not easy to say.



certainly speak of a man as making a statement in such a case. *S.* Well this, at anyrate, anyone can do, sooner or later—can indicate, that is, what he thinks about anything, unless he was born deaf or dumb : and in this way anyone who has a true opinion will be found to have it “accompanied by a reasoned statement,” and there would be no such thing at all as a true opinion that was not knowledge. *T.* True.

*S.* However, we must not decide too hastily that the man who gave the definition of knowledge which we are investigating was talking nonsense. He may possibly have meant something else ; namely, the ability to answer the question, what anything is, by giving a detailed statement of its  
 207 elements. *T.* Give me an example, Socrates. *S.* Hesiod, for instance says “a hundred are the timbers of a waggon,” and I am sure I could not say what they are, nor you either, I expect ; but if we were asked what a waggon is, we should be quite satisfied if we could answer “wheels, axle, body, rail, yoke.” *T.* We should indeed. *S.* But perhaps our theorist might think us as ridiculous as if we were asked to spell your name, and answered by giving the syllables ; we should be expressing a right opinion so far, no doubt, but it would be ridiculous to think we were experts in orthography and were giving an expert statement of Theaetetus’ name, when, in fact, no real knowledge is shown until, in addition to one’s right opinion, one can go through the object element by element, as I believe we said before. *T.* Yes, we did. *S.* In the same way, he would say, we have, no doubt, a right opinion about the waggon ; but it is the man who, in addition, can go right through those hundred items that make up its being, who has added a reasoned statement to his right opinion, and has passed from the stage of mere opinion to that of expert knowledge of the true being of a waggon, having stated the whole by an enumeration of the elements. *T.* And do you not think he would be quite right, Socrates ? *S.* It is you who must tell me if you think so, my friend, and if you accept the view that a reasoned statement of anything is an enumeration of its elements, while a statement by syllables, or some larger fraction still, is unreasoned ; then we can look into it. *T.* Well, I quite accept it.

S. Do you think, then, that any man knows anything when he thinks that the same thing is a part now of one thing, now of another, or that the same thing has now one thing and now another as part of it? T. Indeed I do not. S. Then have you forgotten that that is what you and everyone else did at first, when learning the alphabet? T. Do you mean thinking at one time that one letter was part of a certain syllable and at another another, and putting the same letter at one time into the syllable to which it belonged and at another into another? S. That is what I mean. T. I have certainly not forgotten it, and I am bound to say that I do not think that people in that condition can be said to have knowledge. S. Well, when someone at that stage thinks he ought to write TH and E for Theaetetus, and writes it, and then when he comes to Theodorus, thinks he ought to write T and E, 208 and does so, ought we to say that he knows the first syllable of your name?<sup>82</sup> T. No, we agreed a moment ago that a man in that condition had not knowledge. S. And might he not be in the same situation with regard to the second syllable, and the third and the fourth? T. Certainly. S. Now in such a case, when he is writing out your name, will he have a right opinion of it, and also be enumerating the elements? T. Evidently. S. And yet he is without knowledge, according to us, though he has a right opinion? T. Yes. S. Yes, and combines with his right opinion a reasoned statement? For he writes by means of an enumeration of the elements, which is what we agreed that a "reasoned statement" meant. T. True. S. It appears then, my friend, that there is a true opinion accompanied by a reasoned statement which is not yet what we call knowledge. T. So it seems.

S. Apparently, then, it was only a pauper's dream of gold when we imagined that we had found the absolutely true definition of knowledge. Or shall we refrain from passing judgment yet? For possibly it will be said that this is not

<sup>82</sup> Knowledge means that one knows a thing in every relation, that one knows it in such a way as to be able to deduce all its properties, as one can deduce the properties of an equilateral triangle. See further the *Excursus*, p. 102.

the true sense, but that it is the third of the three possible meanings which, we said, might be given to the expression "reasoned statement" by the theorist who declares that a "reasoned statement" added to right opinion constitutes knowledge.<sup>83</sup> *T.* Quite right; there is another left. One was the image, as it were, of thought in speech; and then there was the one we have just discussed, the process through the elements to the whole; but what do you say is the third? *S.* The third is the meaning most people would give to it—the ability to point to a characteristic by which the object differs from all other things.<sup>84</sup> *T.* Can you give me the reasoned statement of something or other as an example? *S.* Well, take the sun, if you will: I should think you would accept it as a sufficient indication of the sun to say that it is the brightest of the bodies that move in the heaven round the earth. *T.* Quite sufficient. *S.* The point is this. If, as we were saying, you apprehend the difference of anything, which distinguishes it from other things, you will have, according to some people, a reasoned statement of it: whereas so long as your attention is fixed on some common property, the statement will relate to those things in general to which the common property belongs. . . . *T.* I understand; and I think this may very well be called a reasoned statement. *S.* . . . but whoever adds to his true opinion about any object a perception of its difference from other things, will have attained to knowledge of that of which he previously had an opinion only. *T.* That at least is what we are maintaining.

<sup>83</sup> Plato's objection to naming the author of the theory occasionally involves him in very awkward sentences. Apart from this, the continual references backward and forward in this section of the dialogue are by no means suitable to the dialogue style, and remind one more of the *Philebus*.

<sup>84</sup> The following passage is in effect a discussion of the meaning of definition. For practical purposes a definition is sufficient that gives the *species* and the *differentia*. What is required for knowledge is a definition that gives the object its place in the class, that explains it as part of an organic system. The full Platonic theory of definition, as part of classification, is contained in the *Philebus*, 16c *et seq.*

*S.* I must say, Theaetetus, that now, having come close to the theory—as if it were a sketch—I cannot understand it in the least; though when I stood at a distance I thought there was some sense in it. *T.* How? What do you mean? *S.* I will explain, if I can. I, let us suppose, 209 have a right opinion about you; and if I add to it your “reasoned statement,” the result is that I know you; but if not, I have an opinion of you only. *T.* Yes. *S.* And your “reasoned statement” means, as we agreed, the expression of your difference. *T.* That is so. *S.* When, then, I had only an opinion of you, my mind apprehended none of the points in which you differ from other people? *T.* Apparently not. *S.* So that what I had in mind was some one of the common qualities which are no more peculiar to you than to anyone else. *T.* Necessarily. *S.* Well, then, in heaven’s name, if that was so, how can it be said that I had an opinion of you more than of anyone else? For suppose I had in my mind that this is Theaetetus, who is a man, and has a nose and eyes and a mouth, and every limb and feature in the same way: will my idea be an idea of Theaetetus any more than of Theodorus, or, as they say, the remotest Mysian? <sup>85</sup> *T.* How could it? *S.* Further, if I think not only of a man with a nose and eyes, but of a man with a snub nose and prominent eyes, shall I be thinking of you any more than of myself, or anyone else who looks like you? *T.* No. *S.* No, I shall not have an idea of Theaetetus in my mind until this snub nose of yours has left on my mind an impression different from that of all the other snub noses I have seen, and so with all the other details of your appearance, so that they will remind me of you when I meet you to-morrow and give me a right opinion of you. *T.* Very true. *S.* We see then that right opinion is equally con-

<sup>85</sup> It should be observed that there is, in fact, no place in the Platonic philosophy for any real knowledge of an individual person. All that is known is what is universal—the definition of man and the ideal of human character. In the phenomenal world, to which alone the distinction of persons belongs, all that is possible is precisely the recognition of the specific difference. In this sphere there can only be “true opinion,” not knowledge.

cerned with the difference in every case. *T.* It certainly seems so.

*S.* Then what is there that a "reasoned statement" can add to right opinion? For if it means, on the one hand, that one must have an added opinion of the point in which a thing differs from other things, the proposition is ridiculous. *T.* In what way? *S.* When we already have a right opinion of something in its difference from other things, we are told to acquire in addition a right opinion of it in its difference from other things. At this rate the twirling of a roller or a top or any such thing you please would be nothing compared with a rule like this; one might with more justice compare it to a blind man leading the way. For to tell us to get in addition what we have got already, so that we may learn the object of our opinion, is most commendably like the direction of a man lost in the dark. *T.* But if, on the other hand—what was your alternative supposition just now? *S.* If, my boy, the meaning is that we are bidden to know the difference, as opposed to merely having an opinion of it, this finest of all theories about knowledge turns out to be a pretty thing indeed! For knowing means, does it not, getting  
210 knowledge of a thing? *T.* Yes. *S.* Then in answer to the question, what is knowledge, our theorist, it appears, will say "a true opinion combined with a knowledge of the difference." For that according to him is meant by the addition of a reasoned statement. *T.* So it seems. *S.* Yes, and it is absolutely silly, when we are trying to find out what knowledge is, to tell us that it is right opinion combined with knowledge, whether of the difference or of anything else. So then, Theaetetus, neither sensation, nor right opinion, nor a reasoned statement added to right opinion can be knowledge.

## EPILOGUE

—ARE we then pregnant, and in labour with any more ideas about knowledge, my friend; or have they all seen the light? *T.* To tell the honest truth, you have made me say

a great deal more than I really had in me. *S.* But everything that has so far been brought forth the art of midwifery tells us is like an empty egg, and not worth rearing? *T.* Certainly it does. *S.* If then hereafter, Theaetetus, you try to become or do actually become pregnant with other ideas than these, they will be better ones by reason of the present inquiry; and if you remain barren, you will be gentler and milder to your companions, and modest enough not to think you know what you do not know. For there is this power and this alone in my art; and I have none of the knowledge that others have, who are or have been great and famous among men. But this art of midwifery we received, I and my mother, from heaven, she for women, and I for noble and beautiful youths.—And now I must go to the King's porch to answer Meletus' indictment that he has drawn up against me; but to-morrow, Theodorus, let us meet here again.

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# EXCURSUS

## ON THE *Theaetetus*, AND INTRODUCTION TO THE *Philebus*

### I

WHAT then is knowledge? Or, to put the same question in another way, what is the object of knowledge?

The *Theaetetus*, while apparently giving us no express answer, nevertheless contains a sufficiently clear indication of the conclusions at which Plato wishes us to arrive.

The first view discussed is that which we should now call empiricism, according to which the whole of our conscious experience is constructed—or rather constructs itself—entirely out of the materials given to us in sense perception. Materialism, which does not even allow the existence of consciousness, but reduces everything to mechanical reaction, Plato merely dismisses with a word of contempt (155e). Empiricism, on the other hand, he subjects to a very searching analysis, in order to show that, in one form or another, it inevitably assumes the presence in experience of elements which are not in fact given by sense.

On the empirical theory, we know only what comes to us through the senses; consciousness is pure receptivity; the subject is, as far as possible, explained away, and subsists merely as a term in a relation. In fact, if the theory is pressed to its logical conclusion, there can be no consciousness, no existence as a conscious being, except when an object is presented to us (160b). But as a matter of fact any experience, however elementary, will be found to contain elements that are not given in sense. Reflecting on conscious experience in general we see that implies the existence of a unity, a “single form” as Plato calls it

(184*d*), an ego, in short, which correlates the data of the various senses. Experience is my experience; the experience of an identical conscious subject to which a succession of objects is presented. And further it consists of judgments which are immediately seen to be something that is not "given," but the work of the subject itself. The simplest perception<sup>1</sup> involves the affirmation of the object as *being*, in one sense or another, and as being like or unlike another object. These "reflexions" or "considerations" (186*c*) about objects, judgments of relation, quantity, value<sup>2</sup> and the rest, are the framework of experience in general, and the form of all knowledge. Knowledge, in fact, consists of judgments in the various forms of the categories. And these judgments are not presented to us in perception; they are *a priori* modes of thought, modes in which the subject cognises objects and makes them intelligible to itself.

The bare *form* of knowledge, then, is given in these categories. But what is its *matter*? Is that at anyrate wholly given to us in sense perception?

This question is answered by an analysis of the world of pure sense, the Heraclitean flux. Plato, it must be understood, accepts the theory of Heraclitus as one aspect of the truth. The world to him is actually a continued process of change, and perception is actually a relation between terms which are never twice the same. Experience, in one sense, is a continuous diversity. But if it were nothing else, if the change were, by an impossibility, bare change—a change, so to say, from nothing to nothing—if, in fact, the diversity of experience contained no identities, there could really be no such thing as experience at all. If every relation of object to subject were unique, there would be no connexion between one portion of our experience and another; it would fall apart into an endless succession of dissimilar impressions.

<sup>1</sup> Plato does not hold this doctrine in its completeness, in so far as he apparently supposes that the perceptions of young children can be conceived as formed without the categories, which only appear in the consciousness of fully-developed individuals (186*c*). See, however, the *Note on Section 9*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> See note <sup>52</sup>, p. 57.

That this is not the whole account of the matter is sufficiently proved by the existence of language (183*a*, *b*) ; for every word we use presupposes the existence of a definite something to which it applies, and which can be recognised by others.

With the recognition of identities in the diversity of experience—identities recognisable by the identity which is the subject—we begin to see the possibility of knowledge. For here we have a definite object to which thought can be related, and with regard to which one can think rightly or wrongly. Knowledge implies truth (186*c*), and it appears that at any rate there is an element in experience in relation to which truth and falsity are possible.

Is, then, this element given to us in perception ? Does knowledge consist in the correct identification of the objects of our sensations ?

## II

The direct connexion between the discussion of error (Part II.) and the general argument of the dialogue is not, it must be admitted, easy to see. Indeed, it is evident that the analysis of the actual process of perception is carried on to a considerable extent for its own sake ; but I think there can be no question that the main theme is never really forgotten, and that the inferences we are meant to draw, are to be regarded as an integral part of the whole deduction.

The question raised is—can truth and falsity be predicated of the judgments of sense perception ? In one sense of course they can. No one denies that error is of real occurrence, that objects are sometimes rightly identified and sometimes wrongly. And the figurative account that Plato gives of the mental processes involved does, in fact, help to make it clear how right and wrong judgments are formed. Why, then, does the investigation lead to no result ? Because it is tacitly assumed throughout that “right opinion,” the correct identification of objects in the phenomenal world, is knowledge in the completest sense,

an absolute apprehension of the object as (to use a Platonic formula <sup>3</sup>) "identical with itself and other than what is other." In this sense a thing is either known or not known, and it is precisely because this criterion is applied that the successive accounts of the origin of error are found to lead to a contradiction. However many stages are interposed between the perception, which is the subject of the judgment, and the identification, which is the predicate, the same dilemma appears in the end. We are meant to understand that the alternative of absolute truth and absolute falsity is not in fact applicable to judgments of perception at all. It is not the case that we "either know or do not know" objects in the phenomenal world; and any attempt to interpret the identification of particular appearances as knowledge inevitably breaks down.

The distinction is hinted in Socrates' question (190*b-c*), whether it is possible to think that beauty is ugliness, or the just unjust, or a man an ox, or two one. For it is at once seen that our cognition of these abstract notions is of quite a different type from that of correct perception. A man may from a variety of causes fail to see that this or that object of sensation is beautiful; but his notion of beauty in the abstract, however vague it may be, however little content it may have, is nevertheless essentially distinct from his notion of ugliness, or indeed of anything else; he cognises it as "identical with itself and other than what is other" and he "either knows it or does not know it." His cognition, we may say, has the characteristic of *certainty*. And the fact that our conception of knowledge connotes this characteristic of certainty is further indicated at the end of Part II., where it is shown (201*a-c*) that we can arrive at materially correct judgments about particular facts on evidence which does not in reality give any certainty at all. Correct perception, in short, is a matter of contingency; it depends on circumstances, and has none of that intrinsic necessity which we feel to be of the essence of knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g. Timæus*, 37*a*.

## III

But a further possibility remains. It may still be that the necessary certainty can be attained, for instance, by an analysis of the object, or an extended perception of its relation to other objects, in such a way that, without introducing any elements other than those given to us *a posteriori*, we may nevertheless, so to say, convert our perception into knowledge. This possibility is discussed in Part III. of the *Theaetetus*, a masterpiece of analysis, the intention of which is to show that no possible *a posteriori* combination of the elements of empirical perception can give us knowledge, and that therefore what is known, must be known *a priori*.

The question is—granted that merely to recognise an object as such is not to know it, does one know it when one has perceived its component parts, or when one has distinguished it from all other objects?

This is first discussed in connexion with the theory of some philosopher that the cognition of a whole is somehow different in kind from the cognition of its parts; and it is easily shown that the mere addition of partial perceptions which *ex hypothesi* are not knowledge, will never build up a whole perception which *is* knowledge (203*d*); while, if the whole is something other than the sum of its parts, the perception of the one can have no relation to the perception of the other (205*c-d*). Further, if we take the part and the whole as equally knowable, then since, as given in experience, the whole has no other parts, it becomes an undivided unit and therefore, *ex hypothesi* again, unknowable (205*b-d*).

Now in this discussion of the part and the whole it is more than ever necessary to read between the lines in order to discover what Plato means us to infer. What is the presupposition throughout? It is, that an object is merely a sum of parts. The examples chosen to prove that the totality is the whole (204*a sqq.*)—viz. numbers, an army of men, an acre of land—are chosen precisely for the pur-

pose of encouraging this idea. They are cases in which, to all appearance, the parts lie, so to say, side by side, and any number of them may be added without changing the character of the whole. When this is understood it is at once seen that there are other objects of quite a different type, objects that are "single forms," that have an individuality, an organic unity of their own, and are not mere aggregations. On the empirical theory of knowledge and the Heraclitean or naturalistic theory of the universe there are no such objects; and Plato, whose intention is to show the falsity of empiricism (and incidentally of naturalism) on its own postulates, accordingly ignores them. But in his view an object that can be made an object of knowledge is not merely the sum of its parts: it is, so to say, their product. The parts do not merely lie side by side: they exist in a definite, organic arrangement. "A single form resulting from the combination of harmonious elements" (204a) is a very different thing from a bare aggregate. A tree is not a casual assemblage of roots, stem, branches, leaves—nor a waggon (207a) a casual assemblage of wheels, axles, yoke and the rest—but, an individual complex resulting from the arrangement of the parts according to a definite type, or law, which is its "being" or essential principle. It is this essential principle, the Idea of the object, which is its reality, and in virtue of which it is knowable. The doctrine of the unnamed philosopher is thus the exact contrary to the truth, and the whole argument resolves itself into an indirect demonstration of the theory of Ideas.

In the last section, the theory of the unknowable part and the knowable whole having broken down, we take up the question of the possibility of a *posteriori* knowledge afresh. Is it possible to arrive at real knowledge of an object either by a detailed enumeration of its constituents, or by a recognition of its "specific difference," the character which distinguishes it from all other things?

It will be seen that the perception of the parts cannot give certainty to our perception of the whole when it is considered that we shall not necessarily recognise the same parts when they appear in other wholes: *e.g.*, we may have



learned by rote how to spell The- in Theaetetus and yet not recognise the same syllable in Theodorus (208a). And on the other hand, the mere recognition of an object—a “true opinion” of it—already involves the perception of its difference from other things (209d). So that neither alternative gives us what we feel to be necessary for true knowledge.

Here again the negative result points unmistakably to a positive conclusion. The Platonic formula of knowledge is, as has been said, the cognition of something as “identical with itself and other than what is other.” “Identical with itself”: that is to say, it must be known as a syllable is known in whatever word it occurs; the certainty which the ideal of knowledge demands is a *deductive* certainty; our cognition must be such that it will hold good universally, in all possible cases. “Other than what is other”: that is to say, it must be known in its relation to the other objects of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Merely to perceive a thing as distinct from other things, so as to be able to recognise it, is not to know it. One may distinguish, for instance, an elm by its growth, a birch by its bark, a lime by its flowers, a mountain ash by its fruit—each by a different characteristic; but this is not to know them. For that one must, in the first place, perceive the *essential characteristic*; and the perception of the essential characteristic implies the perception of all the characteristics in their proper relations as parts of the whole, and of the whole in its proper relation to the other members of the order to which it belongs.

Thus the two main arguments of this section correspond to the two clauses of the formula of knowledge; and, taken together, they indicate what we must understand by the *logos* or “reasoned statement” which is to be “added to true opinion.” It is proved that a *logos* based on empirical data takes us no further than we were before, but we are left to infer that the case is different when knowledge is understood to be *a priori*.

It will be seen that in the end the process of knowledge

<sup>4</sup> The two requirements correspond to the “clearness and distinctness” of Des Cartes.

takes the form of *classification*. The object is not known until it has been fitted into its place in a complicated scheme of concepts (the concepts, that is, of the types or Ideas which are the essential principles of the various classes of existing things); and this scheme which is the organon by which we make the universe intelligible to ourselves. Everything that is presented to us in experience is cognised by means of the notion corresponding to the universal type of the class to which it belongs; and this notion, in its turn, carries with it, through nearer and remoter degrees of relationship, the whole system of notions which make up the fabric of our universe. The *logos* is the statement or judgment which, by defining the notion, fixes its place in relation to the rest of the system.

## IV

The *Theaetetus* does not take us into the details of Plato's theory of knowledge. It merely deduces—indirectly, except in the case of the categories—the great principles in outline.

All knowledge is *a priori*. Experience is so far from being the basis of knowledge that it is merely the occasion for its exercise. A particular object is never known: what is known is the universal notion which is thought into it by the mind, the "Idea" of which it is the embodiment. No triangle in the world possesses the properties which are ascribed to a triangle in the abstract; no visible line possesses length without breadth; the certainty of geometry depends not on sensible experience at all, but on reason. And what is true of geometry is true, to Plato, of everything that the mind can apprehend. The whole material and immaterial universe is to be known *a priori*. Morality is as certain as the science of nature; and the science of nature is as certain as mathematics. What is beautiful is so by the "presence" in it of absolute beauty—or, as he often preferred to phrase it (since "presence" might imply a realisation of the Idea that was evidently impossible), by virtue of its "imitation"<sup>5</sup> of the beautiful; and it is

<sup>5</sup> On the supposed problem of the "relation of the idea to particulars," see pp. xviii-xx of the *Introduction*.

by our *a priori* apprehension of the beautiful that we perceive it to be so. When we recognise an animal as belonging to a particular class, it is because we dimly see in it the type which is the law of the class, the reality of which the various members are merely appearances. Knowledge is of identities; and all that we know consists of the identities that we think into the diversity of experience.

Moreover we have seen what form the cognition of these identities must be supposed, in Plato's view, to take. The universal can only be known as a member of a system of universals. Every Idea has its *logos*, its "reasoned statement" or definition which gives its place in the series to which it belongs, and its relations to the other Ideas in the series.<sup>6</sup>

And how such a series is to be conceived is indicated in the *Philebus* (as already partially in the *Theaetetus*) by the example of the alphabet. It is argued (18*b sqq.*) that no one letter can be understood "without all of them," and that the whole series only becomes intelligible when viewed as an organised group, in which the "original unity" of vocal sound is divided first into mutes, sonants and vowels, and then successively into smaller and smaller groups "down to the individual members," so that the whole is seen as a single articulate system.

It is in the *Philebus* more than in any other dialogue of Plato that this conception of knowledge, on the one hand, as a system of organic classification, and of reality, on the other, as a system of forms determined by mathematical or quasi-mathematical relations, is developed in detail; and it is the *Philebus* accordingly which best answers the questions that the *Theaetetus* appears to leave unanswered.

<sup>6</sup> The formula for the knowledge obtained by "dialectic," or the science of the Ideas, is, for instance, the ability "to give an account (*logos*) of absolute justice and injustice, what each of them is, and in what they differ from all else or from each other" (*Theaetetus*, 175*c*), or "to think of absolute justice that it is, and have one's thought accompanied by a reason" (*logos*) (*Philebus*, 62*a*).

## V

The subject of the *Philebus* is the determination of the "human good," the ideal life for man; and the dialogue is mainly devoted to an analysis of the various species of pleasure and of intellectual exercise, with a view to deciding what is their comparative value for man, and consequently how far each should enter into the perfect life. The argument, which is often difficult and disconnected, is arranged as follows:—

	No. of Stephanus	pages
Introduction, in the course of which the question of classification is raised (11 <i>a</i> -16 <i>a</i> ) . . . . .		5
I. § 1 Theory of classification, interrupted by a proof that the combination of thought and pleasure is superior to either alone (16 <i>a</i> -23 <i>b</i> ) . . . . .		7
§ 2. Theory of matter and form; reason as the ruling principle of their combination. Relation of thought and pleasure to each (23 <i>b</i> -31 <i>a</i> ) . . . . .		8
II. § 3. Natural history of pleasure; psychology of desire (31 <i>b</i> -36 <i>c</i> ) . . . . .		5
§ 4. True and false pleasures:—pleasures of false anticipation (36 <i>c</i> -41 <i>b</i> ) . . . . .		5
§ 5. Pleasures false in themselves. Pleasures mixed with pain in body alone and in body and mind together (41 <i>b</i> -47 <i>d</i> ) . . . . .		6
§ 6. Mixed pleasures in the mind: theory of comedy (47 <i>d</i> -50 <i>e</i> ) . . . . .		3
§ 7. Pure pleasures. Metaphysic of pleasure in general (50 <i>e</i> -55 <i>c</i> ) . . . . .		5
III. § 8. Intellect: degrees of purity in science and art (55 <i>c</i> -59 <i>d</i> ) . . . . .		4
IV. § 9. Pleasure and intellect as elements of the perfect life (59 <i>d</i> -64 <i>b</i> ) . . . . .		5
§ 10. The form and elements of the Good (64 <i>c</i> -67 <i>b</i> ) . . . . .		3

It will be evident that the dialogue is very unequally constructed. The discussion of intellect is only one-sixth as long as that of pleasure, and is incomplete in itself.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See note <sup>76</sup> on p. 166.

The discussion of pleasure is full and detailed; but here, too, there are inequalities and inconsistencies: the only "mixed pleasure" of the mind that is analysed is that aroused by comedy, which certainly cannot be taken as sufficiently typical of the class: the æsthetic pleasures are described with the utmost brevity; and even the long discussion of the pleasures of sensation and desire is defective, for the demonstration of truth and falsity in pleasure is suddenly converted into an examination of pure and mixed pleasures, without anything to show how or why the transition is effected.<sup>8</sup>

I cannot think it possible that the *Philebus* is meant to be in its final form; nor should I think so, even if the actual writing were far more elegant and finished than it is. But in fact there is hardly any style in the dialogue at all; and it is difficult to understand how anyone could read it closely and suppose it to be the mature work of the man who wrote at other times what is probably the finest prose in the world. The Greek of the *Philebus* is sometimes almost barbarous.<sup>9</sup> The structure of the sentences is continually broken in the middle. Some of them never end at all. There are innumerable redundances and repetitions. The syntax is loose and obscure. The pronouns are so carelessly used that often one can only guess from the context to what they refer; and the prepositions and cases are equally vague, the words "in" and "about" and the possessive case serving to indicate all manner of different relations. On the other hand there are several passages in which a single highly-wrought and epigrammatic phrase is allowed to stand for a whole page of exposition, making a sharp contrast with the loose fluency of the rest. All these peculiarities are exactly what one would expect

<sup>8</sup> We are told that Galen wrote a treatise "On the transitions in the *Philebus*." But this is fortunately lost. Poste supposes "a boldly-executed junction of two originally separate dialogues."

<sup>9</sup> Badham in his second edition has attempted to rewrite the dialogue. He has bracketed words as the insertions of transcribers, or marked sentences as corrupt, times without number, and his emendations and transpositions would fill several pages.

to find in a first draft, when the writer is working out his ideas pen in hand and for the most part thinking faster than the words will come.

The discussion grows briefer, less coherent and more obscure as the dialogue proceeds; there are many passages towards the end in which it is hardly possible to infer with certainty what was really in Plato's mind; and the last section of all is, as it stands, practically unintelligible.

It would be waste of time to inquire why Plato never finished his work; but there can be no question that the method of treatment is often quite unsuccessful—for instance, the attempt to describe form and matter first as "one" and then as "many" (24e-25e). Indeed the main idea of the book, the comparison of pleasure and intellect respectively with the "mixed" life from the point of view of "truth, measure and symmetry," is, to say the least, awkward and unnatural. Moreover the dialogue form is singularly unsuited to what is in reality a straightforward treatise; and in many passages of the *Philebus* the conversation hardly rises above the level of a "Child's guide to knowledge."

At the same time the dialogue contains an astonishing wealth of material, and probably gives one a nearer insight into the main principles underlying Plato's *Weltanschauung* than any other single work. The theory of matter and form, the theory of classification, the view of the world as a series of mathematically determined forms, the explanation of pleasure and pain as resulting from disturbances of the natural structure of the living being, the description of sensation as caused by vibration, the criticism of the æsthetic pleasures, the analysis of the good into measure and symmetry—all these, and a number of minor points, are of the utmost significance. It is useless to read the dialogue as literature—indeed it is often barely possible to translate it into intelligible English—but as a collection of most of the main doctrines of its author, it has a value all its own, and we should have lost the half of Plato if it had not been preserved.

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# PHILEBUS

CHARACTERS OF THE DIALOGUE: SOCRATES, PROTARCHUS,  
PHILEBUS

## INTRODUCTION

*Socrates.* Come then, Protarchus; what is the thesis that Philebus<sup>1</sup> is about to hand over to you, and what my counter-thesis, that you are to attack, if it is not to your mind? Shall we summarise them? *Protarchus.* By all means. *S.* Philebus, then, holds that for all living things enjoyment is good, and pleasure and gratification and everything of that type and character; but I dispute this, and hold that, on the contrary, wisdom and thought and memory and all of that family, right opinion and true reflexions, are at least better and more advantageous than pleasure to all beings that are capable of participating in them; indeed that to such beings participation in them is the greatest boon of all now and for ever. Is that not more or less the position of each of us, Philebus? *Philebus.* Absolutely so, Socrates. *Socrates.* Then do you accept the proffered argument as your own, Protarchus? *Protarchus.* I must, it seems; for our friend Philebus the fair has cried off.

*S.* We must certainly get at the truth of the matter in one way or another. *P.* We must. *S.* Come then, let us settle a further preliminary point. *P.* What is that? *S.* That each of us is undertaking to demonstrate a state and disposition of soul that can make life happy for all men. Is it not so? *P.* It is. *S.* And you and Philebus say it is that of pleasure, and I that of thought? *P.* That is the

<sup>1</sup> Who is meant by Philebus is not known. He was evidently a hedonist who practised his creed, and whom Plato detested accordingly (46b).

case. *S.* And what if some other state is found to be better than these? If it appears to be more akin to pleasure, then, while both of us must yield to a life that satisfies these conditions,<sup>2</sup> the life of pleasure nevertheless wins the day 12 as against the life of thought. Is it not so?<sup>3</sup> *P.* Yes. *S.* But if it be more akin to thought, then thought wins and pleasure is defeated. Do you and Philebus agree to this, or what do you say? *P.* I certainly think so. *S.* And what do you say, Philebus? *Philebus.* I think, and shall continue to think, that pleasure wins from every point of view. As for you, Protarchus, you must decide for yourself. *Protarchus.* Philebus, you have handed over your share of the argument to me, and have no longer any authority to come to terms with Socrates or to refuse. *Philebus.* Well, I call the goddess herself to witness that I wash my hands of it. *Protarchus.* We, too, will bear witness to your words, you may be sure. And now let us proceed, Socrates, and try, with Philebus' help or without it, as he thinks fit, to get through our task.

*Socrates.* We must try; and let us begin with the goddess herself who, according to Philebus, is called Aphrodite, but her truest name, he says, is Pleasure. *P.* Quite right. *S.* But for my own part, Protarchus, I have a more than human awe, indeed a fear beyond expression, of the names of the gods. Aphrodite, then, I will call by whatever name pleases her best: but as for Pleasure, I know that she has many forms, and, as I said, it is with her that we must start, and consider with attention what her real nature is. For pleasure, if one is to go by the name alone, seems to be

<sup>2</sup> Which conditions? The Greek—literally, “the life possessing these things”—is equally vague. The general sense is clear, but it is very loosely expressed. There are countless phrases of this description in the dialogue, and it should be understood throughout that where there is a lack of cohesion in the translation it generally represents a similar deficiency in the original.

<sup>3</sup> The result of the discussion is foreshadowed from the start. The best life is conceived as a harmonious combination of intellectual exercise and pleasure in its higher forms. It will be seen that the whole method of procedure is different from that of the *Theaetetus*. The *Philebus*, as I have said, is not really a dialogue but a treatise.

a single and simple notion, yet it has, you will agree, shapes of every sort and in some ways unlike each other. For instance, we say that the licentious man has pleasure, and the man of temperate life, too, by reason of his very temperance : pleasure, again, we allow to the man who is a fool and full of a fool's notions and expectations, and to the wise man, no less, by reason of his very wisdom ; and whoever says that the one pleasure is like the other in either case would be thought a fool, and with good reason. *P.* They arise, it is true, Socrates, under opposite conditions ; but they are not themselves opposite. For how could pleasure not be more like pleasure, itself more like itself, than anything on earth ? <sup>4</sup> *S.* Or colour, my good fellow, like colour ! For there is certainly no difference in so far as each is a colour ; yet we all know that black is not only unlike white, but its absolute opposite. And in the same way shape is the same as shape ; generically it is all one ; but of the members of the class some are wholly

13 opposed to each other, and others, surely, present every conceivable variety : and we shall find many other things to which the same applies. So that you had better not trust to the argument that makes the most opposite things identical. Some pleasures, I fear, we shall find to be opposed to others. *P.* Maybe ; but how will that hurt our argument ? *S.* Because, I shall argue, though they are unlike, you yet give them all alike a further predicate. For you say that all pleasures are good. Now no one contends that pleasant things are not pleasant ; but though some of them are good, and most, according to us, bad, you call them all good ; though if you are pressed in argument, you admit that they are unlike. What then is present both in the bad and in the good alike that makes you call all pleasures good ?

<sup>4</sup> These difficulties of definition and predication have lost their interest for us. All that follows, until we reach the discussion of the one and the many, would be taken for granted by a modern writer. But it must be understood that sophists and philosophers of various types did actually confuse and mislead intelligent men by quibbles of this description before the nature of language and the principles of logic were discovered by Plato and Aristotle.

*P.* What do you mean, Socrates ? Do you think anyone, after laying down pleasure as the good, will allow you for a moment to say that some pleasures are good and some bad ? *S.* Well, but I suppose you will admit that they are unlike each other, and in some cases opposite ? *P.* Yes, but not in so far as they are pleasures. *S.* Then we are brought back again to the same point, Protarchus. We are to deny, it appears, that pleasure differs from pleasure, and make them all alike, and take no account of the examples I just quoted, but fall to arguing like the feeblest and most inexperienced of disputants. *P.* In what way do you mean ? *S.* I mean that if I were to imitate you in self-defence, and maintain that the most dissimilar of things are altogether like each other, I should have as strong an argument as you, with the result that we shall both appear to be the merest beginners, and our debate will be stranded and lost. So let us go about ; and perhaps if we take up our original positions again we may be able to come to some agreement. *P.* How, pray ? *S.* Let us suppose that it is you who are putting the question to me. *P.* What question ? *S.* Will not wisdom and knowledge and thought and all that I laid down as good, when the question of the good was originally raised—will not these be in exactly the same situation as your own proposition ? *P.* How ? *S.* It will be seen that there are many different sorts of knowledge in all, and some of them unlike each other ; and if, as may happen, we find some to be, in a way, opposite to others, should I be fit to take part in this discussion, if, 14 in my anxiety to avoid this very result, I were to assert that no knowledge is ever different from another, so that in the end our argument vanished into thin air like a fairy-tale, and we made shift to save our lives on a sort of raft of unreason ? *P.* Nay, but this must not happen—except the saving of our lives. Certainly I am glad that you put your argument and mine on the same footing. Let it be agreed that the pleasures are many and unlike, and the kinds of knowledge equally so. *S.* Well, let us frankly recognise the differences that there are both in my good and in yours, Protarchus, and set them clearly before us, and not flinch from putting them to the test, in order to see

if we can find whether pleasure is to be called the good, or wisdom, or some third thing still. For our present purpose, I think, is not to wrangle and dispute whether my view or yours wins the day, but to join our forces in fighting for the truth. *P.* That indeed is what we must do.

*S.* Well, to begin with, let us see if we can come to a somewhat closer agreement on this question. *P.* Which do you mean? *S.* The question that is always bothering people, whether they will or not. *P.* Explain. *S.* I mean the one that we fell in with just now, a question of a very extraordinary nature. For to say that many is one, and one many, is extraordinary indeed, and it does not seem very difficult to argue against either position. *P.* Do you mean when it is said, for instance, that I, Protarchus, am on the one hand naturally a single being, and on the other that there are many of us, and some that contradict others, as for instance that I am great and small, and heavy and light at the same time, and others such things without number? <sup>5</sup> *S.* What you have described, Protarchus, are the commonplace paradoxes about the one and the many which everyone, so to say, is agreed should be left alone, as being childishly simple, and at the same time great obstacles to true discussion. I mean these no more than I mean, for example, when one distinguishes a man's limbs and the parts of his body, and gets him to admit that the unity which he includes all of them, and then laughs at his inconsistency, because, forsooth, he is driven to the monstrous proposition that one is many, indeed infinite, and the many only one. *P.* Then what are these paradoxes on the same subject that you mean, Socrates, which are not yet generally admitted and commonplace?

15 *S.* When, my boy, the unity one assumes is not one

<sup>5</sup> Dr Jackson points out (*Journal of Philology*, vol. x. (1882), pp. 263-266) that these "paradoxes of predication," and even that of the one whole and the many parts mentioned a few lines below, are in Plato's earlier dialogues thought worthy of the most serious attention. We have had them mentioned with respect in one of the earlier-written sections of the *Theaetetus* (154a-155d). But when Plato wrote the *Philebus* he regarded them as "childish."

of the things that become and cease to be, as were those we mentioned just now. For in this sphere, as I said, and with such unities, it is agreed that one must not press the argument home. But when one tries to affirm man as a unity, or as a unity, the beautiful and the good as unities, it is then that we find all the eagerness to make distinctions and the ardour of controversy.<sup>6</sup> *P.* How? *S.* First, whether it is right to suppose that there are such monads with a real being; and in the next place how each of them, single, unchanging, and neither coming nor ceasing to be, can be at once absolutely the unity it is, and at the same time appear in the world of indefinite phenomena—whether one is to regard it as split up and converted into multiplicity, or (which seems the most impossible of all) wholly separated from itself—and yet be found a single identity in the one and in the many alike. This, Protarchus, and not the other, is the problem of the one and the many that I mean; and if it is not properly solved it leads to all manner of difficulties, but if properly, it makes one's way easy. *P.* Then ought we not to begin by working it out, Socrates? *S.* I should certainly say so. *P.* And you may take it that all of us here agree: as for Philebus, it is best not to ask him, but to let sleeping dogs lie.

*S.* Very well. At what point then shall we enter on the wide and many-sided conflict that rages round this subject? I think it must be here. *P.* Where? *S.* Our position is, it seems to me, that this identity of the one and the many is a product of language, and attaches itself to all words now and always. It is no new nor passing phase, but a permanent and unchanging affection of our

<sup>6</sup> These "unities" are the Ideas of Plato. The difficulties mentioned in the following passage are difficulties only felt by those who have been misled by Plato's earlier descriptions of the Idea to conceive it as a substantial entity which actually exists in a suprasensual region, but also somehow appears in the phenomenal world. The difficulties disappear when we conceive the forms of things as mathematically determined configurations of a given matter, the Idea being the law of the form—its equation, so to say. See the *Introduction*, pp. xviii-xx.



words themselves. And whenever a young man first perceives it, he exults as if he had discovered a mine of wisdom, and plays with words in a sort of ecstasy of delight, now bundling them up together into a confused mass, now spreading them out and dissecting them,<sup>7</sup> and bewildering first, and most of all, himself, and then everyone near him, whether older or younger or one of his own age, sparing  
 16 neither father nor mother nor anyone who listens to him—hardly even other animals, and certainly nothing human; for assuredly he would spare no foreigner if he could only lay his hand on an interpreter. *P.* Socrates, do you not see how many there are of us, and all young men, too? And are you not afraid that we shall set on you, and Philebus with us, if you abuse us? However we know what you mean, and if there is any method or device by which a perplexity like this may be got peaceably out of our way, and some better road be found to the goal of our discussion, please do your best; and we will make shift to go along with you. For the matter in hand is no light one, Socrates.

## I.

## MATTER AND FORM

## § 1

*S.* It is not indeed, my sons, as Philebus calls you. However, there is and could be no better way than that of which I have always been enamoured, though often before now it has vanished and left me desolate and forlorn. *P.* And what is that? Pray tell us. *S.* One which it is

<sup>7</sup> The disciple of the sophists, the professional disputants, is a sort of Heraclitus and Parmenides on a small scale in one. At one time he will have nothing but unity and identity: in whatever is proposed for discussion he refuses to recognise any distinction; pleasure, *quâ* pleasure, is identical, and admits of no diversity whatever. At another time he will recognise nothing but diversity: no individual is like another, no sensation like the next; no such thing as an argument from one particular to another is possible. The true method, says Plato, is the recognition of identity in diversity by way of classification.

easy enough to point out, but only too hard to follow. It is the method by which everything connected with art has been discovered. I will explain it to you. *P.* Tell us by all means.

*S.* A gift of the gods to men, as I imagine, it was thrown down from heaven through the agency of some Prometheus with a glowing flame of fire. And the men of old, better men than we and living nearer the gods, handed down the tradition, in the belief that whatever is said to be, consists of the one and the many, and has limit and unlimitedness in its nature. Now this being so contrived,<sup>8</sup> we must ever in all our inquiries lay down one type for everything; for we shall find it present in it; and when we have grasped this, after the one we must look for two, if by chance there are two, or, if not, three or more, and so again with each of those unities in their turn, until it is seen that the original unity is not only one and many and infinite, but also a determinate number; and the many must not be taken in the form of infinity until the whole number of them that lies between the one and the infinite has been observed;—only then can each several unity be let slip into the indefinite.<sup>9</sup> This is the method transmitted to us, as I said, by the gods for investigating and for learning and teaching each other; but the wise men of the present day in their 17

<sup>8</sup> This clause is really the key to the metaphysics of the first two sections. Scientific classification is possible *because* the world is composed of “limit and unlimitedness”—that is, of matter and form. The scheme of “the one and the many” (genus, species and subspecies), by which alone we make the world intelligible to ourselves, is not an arbitrary device of our minds, but reflects the fundamental structure of things. We “lay down one type for everything” because it is “present in it.” (See the *Introduction*, page xxi.)—Unfortunately, the exposition of this all-embracing theory is so artificially arranged (synthetically, instead of analytically), that one must read through the whole before the true significance of any particular part can be appreciated. See the *Concluding Essay*.

<sup>9</sup> This gives the general form of classification, the objective basis of which is explained in § 2. The sophist recognises either absolute unity (identity) or absolute multiplicity (diversity), either the single empty abstract notion or the infinity of particulars. Plato describes classification as the insertion of a definite number of kinds between the unity and the infinity, so

haphazard way lay down unity too hastily and carelessly, and from unity proceed straightway to infinity; the intervening numbers they overlook—though this is the very point which distinguishes true discussion from mere contentiousness in argument. *P.* Something of what you have said, Socrates, I think I understand, but other things I should like to hear put more clearly.

*S.* Well, there is a clear instance in the case of letters, so that you can see what I mean exemplified in what you have yourself been taught. *P.* How? *S.* We have, have we not, in sound transmitted through the mouth a unity, and again an infinite number, in the case of men in general and of each individual? <sup>10</sup> *P.* Yes? *S.* But neither aspect gives us knowledge; neither the perception of its infinity nor that of its unity. It is the recognition of the number and kind of the various types, that gives each of us a knowledge of language. *P.* Very true. *S.* Then again, it is the very same thing that makes one an expert in music. *P.* How? *S.* In the case of this art, too, voice is one. *P.* Undoubtedly. *S.* We may further distinguish two types, high and low, and a third between the two, may we not? *P.* We may. *S.* But the knowledge of these alone would not make you a musician; though if you do not know this much, at least, you would be practically of no account at all in the matter. *P.* True. *S.* It is not, my friend, till you have grasped the number of the intervals in relation to both

that we have the genus regularly divided into species and subspecies down to the point at which the diversity of particulars can no longer be grouped into classes at all. The process is clearly explained in what follows by the example of the letters of the alphabet, and the musical scale.

<sup>10</sup> Vocal utterance is generically one, and, on the other hand, it comprises an infinite variety of sounds and accents. Knowledge consists in perceiving the generic unity as divided into distinct species, or the infinite variety as arranged into groups. Of course, no one really conceives speech as a bare unity, nor yet as a bare diversity. Either extreme is only imaginary. Indeed, it will be seen on reflexion that both ways of looking at any class really come to the same in the end. A series in which the diversity is absolutely continuous, so that no line of demarcation can be drawn anywhere, resolves itself into a unity.

the high and the low notes, and their nature, and what determines the intervals, and the chords produced from them, which our forefathers handed down to us, their descendants, under the name of harmonies—yes, and other similar conditions occurring in the motions of the body, too, that they discovered to be present; which they measured by number, and have taught us to call them rhythms and metres, and to understand that every unity and plurality is to be investigated in the same way—it is when you have grasped this, I say, that you have attained wisdom, and it is when you have comprehended any other real unity by examining it on these principles that you come to know it; whereas the indefinite multitude of particular things or particular cases invariably leaves you indefinite in your knowledge and “worthless and of no account”<sup>11</sup> just because you take no account of number at all. *P. Philebus*, it seems to me that what Socrates has just said is very true.

*Philebus*. I think so too. But why is this argument addressed to us?—and now?—and what does it mean? 18

*Socrates*. Protarchus, Philebus’ question is a reasonable one. *Protarchus*. It is, unquestionably. Will you not answer it?

*S.* I will; but I must go a little more fully into this matter first. I said that when you start with a unity, you must not take it straightway in its aspect as an infinity, but must first have an eye to a definite number. And in just the same way, when, conversely, you are compelled to begin with the indefinite, here again you must not proceed straightway to the unity, but turn your attention first to a definite number, each with its own plurality, and so come to the unity at the end of all. Let us take the case of letters again as an example of what I mean. *P.* How? *S.* When first the infinite variety of voice was observed by some god or godlike man—Theuth, according to the story that is current in Egypt,—he discriminated in the indefinite the vowels, and those, too, not one but many, and other letters again that had no voice, but a sort of sound only, and these again divided into a definite number of kinds; and a third type of letter he set apart which we

<sup>11</sup> A quotation from Homer.

now call the mutes. Next he divided the soundless and voiceless class down to the individual members, and the vowels and the middle letters in the same way; until, having enumerated the whole series, he gave each and all the name "letter"; and seeing that none of us could learn any one of them by itself without all the rest, he devised a single bond, as it were, to unify them, and called it by the name of "the art of letters," which should be a single art to deal with all of them together.<sup>12</sup> *Philebus*. I understand this still more clearly than what went before, *Protarchus*, as far as that goes; but I still miss the same thing as I did a moment since. *Socrates*. You mean, I suppose, *Philebus*, what has this also got to do with the question? *P*. Yes, that is what *Protarchus* and I have been wondering for a long time. *S*. And what if you have been wondering for a long time, as you say, when the answer was all the while before your eyes? *P*. How do you mean? *S*. Has not your discussion been from the very beginning about thought and pleasure—which of the two was to be preferred? *P*. Of course. *S*. And further we hold each of them to be a unity? *P*. Certainly. *S*. Well, the purport of our late argument is just this: to require us to explain how each of them is one and many, without becoming infinite at once;—what number in fact each has in itself before we come to the infinity of particulars.

19

*P*. *Philebus*, somehow or other *Socrates* seems to have led us a detour and cast us into a problem of no small difficulty. Consider then which of us shall answer the present question. It might seem ridiculous for me to be unable to answer and to put the duty on you, when I have

<sup>12</sup> This clearly gives us the notion of knowledge as consisting in the cognition of any class as an articulate system in which each member must be conceived in relation to the whole. The process described is that of distinguishing in any given continuum (as, for instance, the whole possible range of musical sound) determinate groups (as, for instance, the several octaves), each containing a fixed number of determinate units, and it is in relation to this scheme that all particulars are to be apprehended; any given note is *a* or *a sharp*, etc., or a more or less close approximation to it. But it is only in § 2 that the full theory appears.



succeeded to the full responsibility for your share of the discussion ; but it would be far more ridiculous, I think, if neither of us could answer. Consider then what we shall do ; for it seems to me that Socrates is asking us whether there are or are not distinct species of pleasure, and how many there are, and of what nature ; and the same, too, with thought.<sup>13</sup> *S.* Most true, son of Kallias, for whoever of us cannot do this with everything that is an absolute unity and identity, and with everything that is the opposite, is, on the showing of the preceding argument, for all purposes and in all respects wholly and entirely useless. *P.* It almost seems as if it were so, Socrates. However, though it is no doubt an excellent thing for a virtuous man to know everything, the next best thing, failing that, would seem to be to know one's own limitations. I will tell you why I say so at this moment. You, Socrates, have granted us all the present opportunity of determining with your help what is the best of all human possessions. Philebus said it was pleasure and enjoyment and delight and everything of that kind ; but you on the contrary held that it was not these things, but others—and we have several times very willingly reminded ourselves of what you maintain, and rightly, so that we may have both views well in mind and weigh them one against the other. You say, I think, that what has a better claim than pleasure, at any rate, to be called a good, is reason, knowledge, understanding, art and all of that family, and that it is these we ought to pursue and not the others.<sup>14</sup> This, then, was stated on either side, and a dispute arose, when we threatened in jest that we would not let you go home until we had come to some definite

<sup>13</sup> But whoever expects to find either pleasure or thought treated as a continuum, to be differentiated into mathematically determined groups and sub-groups, will, of course, be disappointed. Neither pleasure nor thought is a natural kind with an organic structure. The truth is that the details of the theory of classification as here presented are quite irrelevant to the main theme.

<sup>14</sup> These repetitions of the object of the discussion, which recur throughout the dialogue, are certainly wearisome, and it is difficult to see what purpose they serve. Here the recital is apparently meant as a not very skilful introduction to the "third life," which is superior to either the life of pure pleasure or the life of pure thought.



and satisfactory conclusion ; and you agreed, and delivered yourself up to us for the purpose ; and now we say, as the children do, that what is fairly given cannot be taken back. So you must abandon your present method of meeting our arguments. *S.* What method do you mean ? *P.* 20 Bewildering us and asking us questions to which we could not possibly give a satisfactory answer at the moment. It must not be supposed that our debate is only meant to end in general bewilderment. If we cannot do what is wanted, you must do it yourself ; for that was what you promised. Consider then whether you are to distinguish the kinds of pleasure and of knowledge yourself, or pass the question by, and, if you are able and willing to do so, clear up the point at issue some other way. *S.* Well, I at any rate may evidently dismiss my fears, since you put it in this way ; for your “ if you are willing ” leaves no room for apprehension. Moreover some god seems to have put a certain memory into my head. *P.* What do you mean ? A memory of what ?

*S.* I heard long ago, whether awake or in a dream, a saying about thought and pleasure that now comes back to me ; namely, that neither is the good, but a third thing, different from them and better than either. Now if we can make the truth of this quite evident to ourselves, pleasure loses the prize ; for it will not be identical with the good. Is it not so ? *P.* Yes. *S.* And the discussion of the kinds of pleasure will, in my opinion, no longer be necessary. But we shall see more clearly as we proceed. *P.* Excellent ; please go on as you propose. *S.* Let us then settle one or two points first. *P.* What are they ? *S.* Whatever is the good must be complete, must it not ? *P.* The completest of things, I should imagine, Socrates. *S.* Well, and adequate, too ? *P.* Of course ; and that, too, more than anything in the world. *S.* Yes ; for this, I imagine, must certainly be affirmed of it in any case, that whatever knows it, pursues it and aims at it with the intention of winning it and making it its own, and cares nothing for other things save those the accomplishment of which brings with it what is good. *P.* That is undeniable. *S.* Then let us examine and appraise the life of

thought, and the life of pleasure, taking each separately.

*P.* How do you mean? *S.* Let us suppose that there is no thought in the life of pleasure and no pleasure in the life of thought. For if either of them is the good it must have no need of anything else at all; but if we find something wanting in either of them, evidently that cannot be the true good for us. *P.* How could it be? *S.* Then 21 shall we try the experiment on you? *P.* By all means. *S.* Prepare then to answer my questions. *P.* Say on.

*S.* Would you, Protarchus, consent to live your whole life in the enjoyment of the greatest pleasures? *P.* Why not? *S.* Would you think, then, that you needed anything else, if this was absolutely yours? *P.* Certainly not. *S.* Think well. You would have no need of thought, reason, the power of reflecting when necessary, and all kindred capacities? *P.* Why should I? I should have everything, if I had enjoyment. *S.* And living in this way, you would enjoy through life the greatest pleasures? *P.* Why not? *S.* And yet without reason, memory, knowledge, right opinion, you must needs be ignorant, in the first place, whether you are enjoying or not, since you are wholly devoid of all thought? *P.* Necessarily. *S.* Moreover, without memory you could not even remember that you had ever enjoyed, and of the pleasure experienced at any moment no trace of recollection would remain: and again, without true opinion you could not think you were enjoying when you were enjoying, and lacking the power of reflexion you could not infer that you would be capable of enjoyment in the future; and you would live the life not of a man but of some whelk or those creatures in the sea that live in bodies of shell. Is that not so? Can we come to any other conclusion? *P.* None. *S.* Is then such a life desirable? *P.* This argument has absolutely reduced me to silence, Socrates.

*S.* Still, we must not lose heart. Let us now take the life of reason, and see. . . . *P.* What? *S.* Whether on the other hand any of us would consent to live in possession of thought and reason and knowledge and the complete power of memory, but without the least particle of pleasure, or of pain either—in fact, absolutely insensible to all such

feelings. *P.* Neither of the two lives seems desirable to me, Socrates ; nor would it to anyone else, I imagine.  
 22 *S.* But what of the life, Protarchus, which is compounded of both ? *P.* Of pleasure, you mean, and reason and thought ? *S.* That is exactly the life I mean. *P.* I presume that everyone without exception will prefer it to either of the others.

*S.* Then is the result of the present argument clear ?  
*P.* Certainly : that three lives were put forward, but that two of them were alike inadequate, and not to be desired either by man or animal. *S.* Then is it not evident that the good is to be found in neither of them ? For otherwise it would have been adequate and complete and desirable to every being, plant or animal, that could make such a life permanently its own ; and had any of us chosen otherwise, it would have been a contradiction of the truly desirable, and the result, not of free choice, but of ignorance or some malevolent fate. *P.* It seems to be so, at anyrate. *S.* I think, then, that it has been sufficiently demonstrated that Philebus' goddess cannot be identical with the good.  
*Philebus.* No, nor is your reason the good either, Socrates ; evidently it will be open to the same charges. *Socrates.* My reason, very possibly, Philebus ; but not, I think, the ideal reason, the divine reason,<sup>15</sup> which stands on a very different footing. However, I do not as yet press reason's claim to the prize as against the mixed life ; but we must consider and see what we are to do about the second prize. For very possibly we shall maintain, the one of us, that reason is the cause of the common life,<sup>16</sup> and the other, pleasure ; in which case, though neither of them would be the good, it might be assumed that one of the two is its cause. On this point I should argue still more strongly than before, as against Philebus, that whatever is the ingredient in this mixed life which makes it desirable and good, it resembles and is more akin to reason than to pleasure ; with the result that pleasure could not rightly

<sup>15</sup> The divine reason is explained in the next section.

<sup>16</sup> What is meant, is, of course, that one of the two is the ingredient of the mixed life which gives it its characteristic value.

claim a share either in the first or the second prize ; nay, if we are to put any trust at all in my reason, it does not even rise to the third place. *Protarchus*. Well, it seems to me, Socrates, that your present argument has, so to say, beaten pleasure to the ground : its claim to the first prize is overthrown. While as for reason, one can only say, 23 apparently, that it was wise not to compete for the prize ; for it would only have met the same fate. But if pleasure is to lose the second prize, too, she would be positively disgraced in the eyes of her own lovers : even they would no longer think her beautiful. *S*. What then ? Would it not be better to leave her alone now, and not to pain her by subjecting her to the most exacting test and exposing her ? *P*. You are talking nonsense, Socrates. *S*. Because I said what was impossible, namely, to pain pleasure ? *P*. Not only that, but because you seem not to understand that none of us will let you go until you have argued these questions out to the end.

## § 2

*S*. Mercy on us, Protarchus ! Then we have a long discussion still before us, and not, I think, a very easy one either. For indeed it appears to me that, if I am to advance against the second prize on reason's behalf, I shall need some other device—weapons, so to say, different from the previous arguments—though some, it may be, are the same. Am I to proceed ? *P*. Of course.

*S*. Let us try, then, with all due circumspection to lay down the first principles of the discussion.

*P*. What do you mean ? *S*. Let us divide the whole contents of the universe into two, or, if you will, three kinds.

*P*. Tell us how you mean. *S*. We must recur to part of the previous discussion. *P*. And what is that ? *S*. We were saying, I think, that the Deity had divided all things into the unlimited and limit ? *P*. Quite so. *S*. Let us then lay down these as two of the kinds I mean, and as the third, that which results from the combination of these two into one. But stay ; it seems to me that I am rather a ridiculous person at distinguishing and enumerating

classes. *P.* What do you mean, my good sir? *S.* It appears that I want still a fourth kind. *P.* And what is that? *S.* It is the cause of the combination of the first two, which I must ask you to add to the three others.<sup>17</sup>

*P.* Well, and will you want a fifth, too, distinguishable from the rest? *S.* Possibly; but at any rate I do not think so at present: if, however, I find I need it, you will no doubt forgive me for looking for it. *P.* Proceed. *S.* Let us first take three of them apart from the fourth, and look at each of the first two split up and scattered into a plurality, and again collected into a unity, in order, if we can, to get an idea how each of them is naturally one and many.<sup>18</sup>

*P.* If you would put it a little more clearly, I might follow  
24 you. *S.* I mean, then, that the two kinds I propose are those I named just now, the unlimited, and the other, that which has the power of limiting; and I will try to explain in what way the unlimited is many; the limitant must await our convenience. *P.* Agreed.

*S.* Attend then; for what I am asking you to consider is a difficult and contentious matter; but please consider it none the less. Tell me first if you can conceive any limit to hotter and colder; is it not rather the case that the more-and-less present in the class, so long as it is present, precludes any finality? For, wherever an end is reached the more-and-less ends likewise. *P.* Very true. *S.* Whereas in the hotter and the colder we maintain that the more and the less are always present. *P.* Certainly. *S.* It follows then that these two opposites can never have an end; and being endless they are, I presume unlimited.<sup>19</sup> *P.* Very much so, Socrates. *S.* Many thanks, my dear Protarchus, for reminding me that this "very"

<sup>17</sup> These four classes will be found in the sequel to be—matter (in the widest sense and not only physical matter), form, matter informed, and the general principle or law which governs the process of formation. All are abstractions from the concrete reality; for there is actually no matter without form, and all form is the embodiment of law. What is to be understood by law in this sense is only hinted in § 2; the complete statement is given at the end of the dialogue.

<sup>18</sup> This is according to the formula of classification in § 1.

<sup>19</sup> This analysis is to be understood as closely connected with

of yours, and "slightly," too, have the same property as more and less. For where they are present they prevent the appearance in any case of a definite quantity, and by giving every process the property of indefinitely greater and less intensity they produce the more and the less and abolish definite quantity altogether. For, as I said just now, if they do not abolish definite quantity, but allow it, and the mean,<sup>20</sup> to appear in the region of the more and less and "very" and "slightly," they disappear from their place altogether. For if quantity is admitted, there would no longer be a hotter and colder: for the hotter and colder alike progress indefinitely, and stay nowhere; but definite quantity stands still and goes no further. This argument then goes to show that the hotter and its opposite are unlimited. *P.* It seems so, at any rate, Socrates. As you said, the matter is not easy to follow; but continual repetition may bring questioner and answerer to a substantial agreement.

*S.* You are quite right, and we must do our best. But for the moment consider if you will accept the following as

the theory of classification. All the infinite varieties of temperature, for example, together make up an "indefinite," a *continuum* which must be differentiated into definite groups and sections. It must, as we should say, be conceived *discretely*. Qualities are only intelligible to us when we introduce the notion of quantity. Colours we compare by saying that one is "two shades lighter" than another. Heat we measure by a thermometer. All this can be extracted from the text by an attentive reader; but Plato, not only here, but continually throughout the dialogue, might be thought to have made it his object to express himself in as mysterious and awkward a manner as possible.

<sup>20</sup> This sudden introduction of "the mean" is in reality premature. So far Plato is trying to give an idea of form in the abstract as opposed to matter in the abstract—matter being what is potentially capable of any degree of extension or intension, and form what actually determines it. We are dealing simply with form as "limit," as introducing a "definite quantity" into a previously indefinite continuum. It is only when we come to the combination of form and matter that form appears as a quantity dependent on various symmetrical and harmonious relations. But this is not the only place in which the successive stages of this curiously formal argument are confused.



the general characteristic of the unlimited, so that we need not go at great length through the whole list. *P.* What is it? *S.* Whatever we perceive to occur more or less and to admit of "very" and "slightly" and "excessively"

25 and all such terms, all these we must unify by putting them into the class of the unlimited, according to the principle we laid down, which was, if you remember, that one must bring together what is scattered and split up, and stamp it as far as possible with a single character. *P.* I remember. *S.* Then the things that do not admit of these terms, but admit all that are opposite to them—first the equal, or equality, and next the double, and all the relations of number to number and measure to measure—all these, I think, we should do well to allot to the limit.<sup>21</sup> Do you agree? *P.* Yes; excellent, Socrates.

*S.* Very well, then; but what form shall we ascribe to the third class, the one compounded of the other two? *P.* You will tell us both, I expect. *S.* Say rather, some god, if a god lends ear to my prayers. *P.* Pray, then, and think. *S.* I am thinking; and I believe, Protarchus, that one of them has, in fact, lent us his countenance. *P.* What do you mean? What sign do you go by? *S.* I will tell you, of course; and you must attend to what I say. *P.* Say on. *S.* We were speaking just now of hotter and colder, were we not? *P.* Yes. *S.* Then add to them drier and wetter, and greater and less, and faster and slower, and all that a moment ago we unified as having the typical character of the more-and-less. *P.* You mean, of the unlimited? *S.* I do. And now proceed to mix in with it the family of the limit? *P.* Which? *S.* The family which we ought to have collected together just now, when we collected the family of the

<sup>21</sup> The "things that admit of equality and all the relations of number and measure" are the mathematical or quasi-mathematical forms appropriate to each matter. But throughout there is a sort of confusion between what admits of these determinations and the determinations themselves—between the concrete form and what we may call its law. The two cannot, of course, strictly be thought apart, any more than matter can strictly be thought apart from form.

unlimited, but did not<sup>22</sup>—I mean that of the limitant. However, perhaps it will come to the same thing, and when the two are put together, the nature of the other will be seen. *P.* Which other? What do you mean? *S.* The class of the equal and double and all that checks the mutual divergence of the opposites, and by the application of number makes them symmetrical and harmonious.<sup>23</sup> *P.* I understand. You mean, I imagine, that when we mix the two classes certain products result in each case. *S.* Quite right. *P.* Proceed.

*S.* In the case of disease does not the right conjunction of the two produce the typical character<sup>24</sup> of health? *P.* Most certainly. *S.* And in low and high and fast and slow, which are unlimited, does not the intervention of the same agents produce limit, and build up the whole fabric of music? *P.* It does indeed. *S.* Then again in cold and heat their intervention removes the excess and unlimitedness, and produces measure and symmetry. *P.* Well? *S.* Now do not the seasons and all beautiful things proceed from this source, that is from the fusion of what is unlimited with the limitants? *P.* No doubt. *S.* Yes, and other things innumerable, which I omit, such as health, beauty and strength; and in the mind again products as lovely as they are numerous. For the goddess, my handsome Philebus, looking at the insolence

<sup>22</sup> That is to say, whereas the "unlimited" has been described both in the form of unity, by means of the definition "that which admits of the more and less" (24e), and in that of plurality, as "hotter-and-colder, faster-and-slower, drier-and-wetter," etc. (25c), the "limit" has so far only been defined as "every relation of number to number and measure" (25a), and there has been no explicit enumeration of instances. Plato now remarks that the kinds of form can only be properly seen in relation to the various kinds of matter. The general nature of form is mathematical symmetry, but how the symmetry is realised in each class cannot be explained until we effect the "mixture."

<sup>23</sup> This notion of "symmetry" (with that of "measure") is the essence of the theory. See the *Concluding Essay*.

<sup>24</sup> Literally "nature" simply; but the word has a much more definite meaning in the later dialogues of Plato. See A. Benn, *The Idea of Nature in Plato* in *Arch. f. Gesch. d. Phil.*, ix. (1895).

and universal wickedness of all men, and seeing that there was no limit to pleasures and indulgences in them, established the law and order that the limitants produce ; and you say that she spoils all, but I, on the contrary, that she saves and preserves. What do you think, Protarchus ? *P.* Oh, I approve entirely, Socrates. *S.* These then are the three classes that I have described, if you understand me. *P.* I think I understand : you mean, apparently, to distinguish in all things first of all the unlimited, and secondly limit, but I do not quite grasp what you mean by the third class. *S.* Because, my good sir, the multitude of its family bewilders you. However, the unlimited, too, had many kinds, and yet we stamped it with the character of the more and less and showed that it was one. *P.* True. *S.* The limit, again, had not many classes, and we had no difficulty in accepting its generic unity. *P.* Of course not. *S.* No ; and now, when I speak of the third, you must understand me to be classing as one the whole offspring of the other two, as a process into actuality resulting from the numerical relations established with the agency of the limit.<sup>25</sup> *P.* I understand.

*S.* Well, we said that there was still a fourth kind to be investigated ; let us look at it together. Tell me ; do you think that everything that comes into being does so through some cause ? *P.* I certainly do. How otherwise could it come to be ? *S.* Now is there any difference except in name between the creative principle and the cause ? Would it not be right to say that the maker and the cause are one ?<sup>26</sup> *P.* Quite right. *S.* Again, we shall  
 27 find, shall we not, that what comes to be and what is

<sup>25</sup> Literally "a becoming into being out of the measures created in company with the limit"—one of those brief and dark sayings characteristic of the *Philebus*. (Protarchus' reply is evidently absurd.) A given class of matter is in itself a mere "becoming"—nothing but the potentiality of concrete existence. It comes "into being" by the appearance in it of definite form dependent on "measures"—that is, a mathematically determined structure, as it were crystals in a solution. There is, of course, in reality no matter without form ; and all form is an approximation to ideal symmetry.

<sup>26</sup> The notion of the universal cause is more fully explained at 30b sqq.

made likewise differ in name only? *P.* Yes. *S.* Now does the creative principle naturally lead in all cases, and that which is created come into existence in obedience to it? *P.* Certainly. *S.* Then there is an entire difference between cause and that which is the instrument of cause in the process of becoming. *P.* Proceed. *S.* Did not the world of becoming, and the components of all that comes to be, provide us with our three classes? *P.* Quite so. *S.* But what creates all these we class as a fourth kind, namely cause, which we have conclusively shown to be different from the others. *P.* It is certainly different.

*S.* Now, having discriminated these four, we had better, to remind ourselves, enumerate them in order.

*P.* Well? *S.* First then I mention what is unlimited, and secondly limit; thirdly, what has come into actual being through the combination of the two; and the cause of the combination and the coming into being I am right, I think, in classing as a fourth. *P.* No doubt. *S.* Come then; what is our next business? What was our purpose in arriving at this point? Was it not this? We were inquiring whether the second prize would fall to pleasure or to thought. Was it not so? *P.* It was. *S.* Are we now, after making these distinctions, in a better position to come to a final adjudication of the first and second places, which was the original subject of dispute? *P.* Maybe.

*S.* Come then. We awarded the victory, I believe, to the mixed life of pleasure and thought. Was it not so?

*P.* It was. *S.* Now can we not see what this life is, and to which class it belongs? *P.* No doubt. *S.* Yes, we shall affirm it, I imagine, to be a member of the third class; for it is compounded, not of a single pair of qualities, but of all the kinds of the unlimited bound by the limit,<sup>27</sup> so that this victorious life will properly belong to that class. *P.* Quite properly. *S.* Very well; but what of your life, Philebus, the life of pleasure pure and unmixed? In

<sup>27</sup> This must not be taken as meaning that the ideal of human life is co-extensive with the universe. It is a careless or a wilfully disconcerting way of saying that the human good must, include all the elements of human experience—except indeed, that the grosser pleasures are excluded.

which of the classes we named would one be right in placing it? But answer one question before you declare yourself. *Philebus*. Ask by all means. *Socrates*. Have pleasure and pain a limit, or are they of the class that admits of the more and less? *P*. They are, certainly—the class that admits of the more, *Socrates*; for pleasure would not be altogether a good, were it not in fact unlimited both in  
 28 number and intensity. *S*. No, *Philebus*, nor pain altogether an evil; so that we must look for something other than the character of unlimitedness, in order to say that that is what gives to pleasures an element of goodness. However, let us grant you that pleasure is one of the things unlimited:<sup>28</sup> but as for thought and knowledge and reason, to which of the aforesaid classes are we to allot them, *Protarchus* and *Philebus*, without impiety? For to my mind the risk is great, and it makes no slight difference whether we answer the question correctly or not. *P*. Ah, you are anxious to glorify your own god, *Socrates*. *S*. And you your goddess, my friend. However, we must answer the question. *Protarchus*. *Socrates* is clearly right, *Philebus*, and we must do what he says. *Philebus*. Well, did you elect to answer on my behalf, *Protarchus*. *Protarchus*. Quite so; but at this point I have almost lost my bearings; in fact I must beg of you, *Socrates*, to expound these matters to us yourself, so that we may not be inadvertently betrayed into some irreverence about your candidate.

*Socrates*. I must do what you wish, *Protarchus*: and, as a matter of fact, there is no great difficulty about it. Did I really, as *Philebus* said, frighten you with my mock solemnity when I asked to which class reason and knowledge belonged? *P*. You did indeed, *Socrates*. *S*. Why, it is easy enough. All the philosophers, glorifying them-

<sup>28</sup> This again must not be taken too literally. Pleasure and pain together constitute an 'unlimited,' analogous to hot-and-cold, and the rest, in that they potentially admit of indefinite increase of intensity on either side of the neutral point. But the analogy is not precise. They do not come into actual existence in mathematically determined forms. Except in the case of the æsthetic pleasures, they depend on a deviation from the natural structure of the individual—that is, on what may be called a temporary excursion into the "unlimited."

selves in all seriousness, agree to maintain that reason is the ruler of heaven and earth. And very possibly they are right : but, if you will, let us look into the question of the class to which it belongs somewhat more at length.

*P.* Say what you will, Socrates, and take no account of length : we shall not find you wearisome. *S.* Good.

Then let us begin by asking some questions. *P.* Well ?

*S.* Are we to say, Protarchus, that all things, and this universe, as we call it, are governed by the force of blind and random circumstance; or on the contrary, as our forefathers said, that reason and a most admirable wisdom orders and controls it ? *P.* My good Socrates, there is no comparison.

Indeed what you said first seems to me positively impious : but to hold that reason orders all things is what the very aspect of the universe, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the whole circumference of the heavens, requires us to believe ; and I, at anyrate, could never say or think otherwise.<sup>29</sup>

*S.* It is then your wish that we should assent to the doctrines of those before us, and say with them that it is so ; and not think it right merely to shelter ourselves by 29 quoting the opinions of others, but share the risk and bear the censure with them, when some clever fellow affirms that on the contrary everything is in disorder ? *P.* Of course it is my wish.

*S.* Come then, consider the question that arises next.

*P.* Let us hear it. *S.* We can see, I think, the components of the bodies of all animals—fire, and water, and air, yes, and land in sight, too, as they say in a storm at sea—all elements of the composition. *P.* You may well say so : we are indeed storm-tossed with difficulties in this discussion.

*S.* Very well then ; now I want you to look at each of the elements that appear in us in this way.

<sup>29</sup> Plato conceives the world as a whole to be one living organism, the main structure of which is to be regarded as the embodiment or concrete expression of divine reason. (See 30*a-d.*) The universal process of the information of matter, the “combination of the unlimited and the limit,” resulting in what he calls (64*b*) “a living body governed by the law of an immaterial system,” is the self-realisation of reason under the forms of time and space. The full theory is given in the *Timæus* and the *Laws*.



How? *S.* The quantity of each in us is small, inconsiderable, and in no respect pure or with the power worthy of its properties. Let one case stand for all: fire, for instance, is present in us, and in the universe. *P.* Well? *S.* Is not the fire in us a small quantity, feeble and inconsiderable, but that in the world wonderful in quantity, beauty and the power proper to fire? *P.* That is very true. *S.* What then? Is the latter born from and nourished by the former? Does the fire in the world take its rise from that in us; or, on the contrary, is not the fire in me and in you and in all living things wholly derived from the other? *P.* That is a question which does not even deserve an answer. *S.* Quite right; and you will say the same, I imagine, about the earth in animals here and the earth in the world; and the same, too, of all the other things about which I asked just now? *P.* Who could give any other answer, and not be thought insane? *S.* No one probably. But see what follows. Do we not call all these as we see them combined into one, body? *P.* Well? *S.* Apply this to what we call the cosmos: it, too, will be a body in the same way, being composed of the same elements. *P.* Quite right. *S.* Then is it the case that our body is wholly fed by this body; or that by ours—and derives from it all the qualities we mentioned? *P.* This is another question, Socrates, that is not worth asking. *S.* And what of this? Is this worth asking, pray? *P.* What is the question? *S.* Are we not to affirm that our body has a soul? *P.* Clearly we are. *S.* Whence, then, could it derive it, Protarchus, if it were not the case that the body of the world is also alive, and has the same properties as this body of ours, but in a far more beautiful form? <sup>30</sup> *P.* Clearly from this source alone, Socrates.

*S.* Yes, for I imagine we can hardly suppose, Protarchus,

<sup>30</sup> It must be understood that by soul in the objective sense—not in the sense of consciousness which it has in the *Theaetetus*, but in that of life—Plato understands a concrete substance, which, indeed, he seems to have regarded as the substratum of all actual existence. Aristotle defines soul generally “as the form of the body”; for Plato it would be more true to say that reason is the form of the soul.

that those four things, limit and unlimited and the common class, and the fourth kind, cause, which is present in all things — that whereas cause, I say, in us produces life and creates bodily activity, and the art of healing when the body is sick, and in all things is ever readjusting and healing, and is called everywhere and in every form, wisdom, yet, though the very same elements are present in the whole heaven, and in great masses, and moreover beautiful and unalloyed, that in them it should not have designed the type of the highest beauty and excellence? *P.* That would certainly be quite unreasonable. *S.* Then, if so, should we not do well to assent to the view I mentioned, and maintain that, as we have often said, there is in the universe much unlimited, and of the limit a sufficiency, and moreover a mighty cause that orders and arranges years and seasons and months, and has the best claim to be called wisdom and reason? *P.* The best claim, indeed. *S.* But wisdom and reason cannot come into being without life. *P.* No. *S.* You will agree then that in the nature of Zeus<sup>31</sup> a kingly soul and a kingly reason is born by the power of the Cause, and in other things, other noble qualities under such names as best suits each. *P.* Assuredly. *S.* This argument, Protarchus, you must not think I have advanced to no purpose; for it reinforces those of old who declared that reason ever rules the universe. *P.* True. *S.* And it affords the answer to my question, namely, that reason is a relative of that which we called the cause of all things, and which was one of our four classes. You understand now that this is our answer? *P.* I do, quite clearly: but I did not notice that you had answered it at the time. *S.* A jest sometimes gives one relief from serious discussion.<sup>32</sup> *P.* Very true. *S.* As for reason then, my friend, we have now, I think, fairly sufficiently demonstrated to what 31

<sup>31</sup> "Zeus" is the living Cosmos. "Cause" is personified in the *Timæus* as "the Creator." It is the law of the information of matter, the impersonal reason embodied in the types of things.

<sup>32</sup> The Greek word translated as "relative" is *genoustés*, a unique formation. There is evidently meant to be a pun on this and *nous*, reason; but most people will prefer the serious discussion.

family it belongs, and what is its power. *P.* Certainly. *S.* And similarly we showed some time ago what was the family of pleasure. *P.* True. *S.* Let us remember, then, that we found reason to be related to cause and, so to say, of its family; but pleasure was unlimited itself, and belonged to the class of things that have neither beginning nor middle nor end in themselves and by their own nature. *P.* We will remember, of course.

## II

## PLEASURE

## § 3

*S.* OUR next task is to see where each of them is to be found, and what circumstances occasion their appearance. First take pleasure: as we investigated its class before that of knowledge, so we will take it first here. And further, it would be impossible to investigate pleasure properly apart from pain. *P.* If this is the road we must follow, let us follow it. *S.* Now is your view of their origin the same as mine? *P.* What is it? *S.* It seems to me that both pleasure and pain necessarily occur in the common class.<sup>33</sup> *P.* Please remind us, my dear Socrates, which of those you named you mean by the common class. *S.* I will do my best, my dear sir. *P.* Good. *S.* We must understand, then, by the common class the one which we mentioned third of the four. *P.* The one that followed the unlimited and the limit, and in which you placed health, and, I think, harmony too? *S.* Quite right. But now you must pay great attention. *P.* Say on.

<sup>33</sup> Bury's note is as follows:—"Here pleasure is again treated of as a concrete fact of life (no longer 'viewed *per se* and apart from pain, which acts as a salutary' limit, to cite Paley's note), and so passes from the purely abstract and metaphysical category of the "unlimited" to that of the "mixed.—In what sense pleasure is an "unlimited" has been pointed out in note <sup>28</sup> above. The notion is not "metaphysical" at all. And to speak of pain as a limit makes nonsense of three parts of the dialogue. Pain is an "unlimited" exactly as pleasure is, only its direction is contrary. The true limit is the neutral point; which is really Plato's ideal. See note <sup>36</sup> below.

*S.* I say, then, that when the harmony in living things is dislocated, there occurs a dislocation of the natural structure which simultaneously produces pain. *P.* That seems very likely. *S.* But when it is readjusted, and returns to its natural state, pleasure is produced—if things of great importance are to be described in the fewest possible words. *P.* I think you are right, Socrates; but let us try if it cannot be put still more clearly. *S.* Well I think the commonest and most everyday instances are the easiest to understand. *P.* Which do you mean? *S.* Hunger, I imagine, is a dislocation and a pain? *P.* Yes. *S.* But eating, which is a replenishment, is a pleasure. *P.* Yes. *S.* Thirst, again, is a destruction and a pain, but the effect of moisture replenishing what is parched, 32 is pleasure. Dissociation, again, and displacement of the natural structure in the shape of excessive heat is painful, while the reaction of cooling is, by nature, pleasant. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Cold, too, the unnatural curdling of the moisture in an animal, is a pain: but the return to nature, when the original condition is restored by redistribution is pleasurable. In short, tell me if you do not think it reasonable to say that when the living form that has come into being by natural law from the unlimited and limit—when this, as I was saying, is destroyed, the destruction is pain, but the reaction that consists in the return to its own essential form is invariably pleasure.<sup>34</sup> *P.* So be it. I certainly think this is a fair outline of the matter. *S.* Shall we then lay down this as one class of pleasure and pain, to be found respectively in the affections we have described? *P.* Agreed.

<sup>34</sup> This theory of pleasure and pain rests on the assumption of a natural structure in an organism, a state of equilibrium, so to say, which is continually displaced, and as continually readjusts itself. The displacement is felt as pain, the readjustment as pleasure. The naturalistic theory of pleasure and pain, as attaching respectively to occurrences that tend to preserve or injure life, explains why the feelings occur when they do, but not how we come to have them at all: it gives their occasion, but not their origin. Plato accounts for them by his hypothesis of an essential harmony between the parts of the organism, which is, in fact, the organism itself.

*S.* Take next the anticipation that is present in the mind itself, corresponding to these affections—that of pleasant things, pleasant and cheerful, and that of painful things, apprehensive and painful. *P.* Yes, this is certainly another form of pleasure and pain, that occurring through anticipation in the mind itself, apart from the body.

*S.* A very just remark; for in these cases, it seems to me, the affection being to all appearance pure and unmixed with pain or with pleasure respectively, we shall see clearly what we want to know about pleasure, that is, whether the whole class is desirable, or whether it is to some other of the classes we named originally that desirability must be attributed, while as for pleasure and pain, like hot and cold and all such things,<sup>35</sup> they are sometimes to be desired and sometimes not, as not being in themselves good, but at certain times and in certain cases admitting the character of good things. *P.* You are quite right; this is the direction in which our inquiry must proceed.

*S.* First then let us notice this point: if it is really the case, as we said, that dissolution in the living organism results in pain, and restoration in pleasure, let us consider what must be the condition present in animals at a time when neither dissolution nor restoration is in process. Give your whole mind to the question, and tell me—does it not necessarily follow that at such moments every animal is without either pleasure or pain, great or small? *P.* Necessarily. *S.* Then have we not here a third state,  
 33 which is neither that of pleasure nor that of pain? *P.* Well? *S.* Come then; see that you bear this well in mind; for the answer to the question whether this is so or not, has no slight bearing on our decision with regard to pleasure. If you have no objection we will dwell on this third state for a moment. *P.* Proceed. *S.* You will see that there is nothing to prevent the man who has chosen the life of thought from living in this way.<sup>36</sup> *P.* You mean neither

<sup>35</sup> The analogy of hot and cold is not to be pressed. See note <sup>28</sup> above.

<sup>36</sup> Whereas the life of pure pleasure, apart from every form of thought, is not, in fact, a possibility at all (21b-c). There is a perceptible vacillation in Plato's attitude towards the "third

enjoying pleasure nor suffering pain? *S.* Yes. For we said, if you remember, when we were putting the two lives side by side, that the man who chose the life of thought and reason must not enjoy any pleasure great or small.

*P.* We certainly said so. *S.* Well, it now appears that it is possible for him to do so: and indeed it would not be so very strange if such a life were the most divine of all.

*P.* Certainly it does not seem likely that the gods feel either pleasure or the opposite. *S.* Assuredly it is not likely: at any rate either feeling is unworthy of their divinity. However, let us leave this point to be considered later on, if it should be necessary for our argument; and we will count it among reason's claims to the second prize, if it cannot claim the first. *P.* Quite right.

*S.* Now the second type of pleasures which, we agreed, occur in the mind alone is entirely the product of memory.

*P.* In what way? *S.* We must first it seems take up the question of memory — yes, and of sensation, I think, before memory, if we are to make this part of the subject properly clear to ourselves. *P.* How do you mean?

*S.* You must suppose that of the impressions our body receives at any time some are extinguished in the body before they penetrate to the mind, which they thus leave unaffected, but others go through both and set up a sort of vibration,<sup>37</sup> some of which is peculiar to each and some common to both. *P.* Agreed. *S.* Now I think we should be correct in saying that the mind is oblivious<sup>38</sup> of those that do not go through both, but not of those that do. *P.* No doubt. *S.* By being oblivious I

life." He recurs to it more than once, and would evidently like to proclaim it as the ideal; but, on the other hand, he is bound to allow that certain pleasures are quite innocent, and must be included in the "human good" however "divine" insensibility may appear.

<sup>37</sup> The word used (*seismos*) means commonly an earthquake. This application of it appears to be peculiar to Plato (*Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*), and has a curiously modern air. Here again we see the theory of an organism as a closely interconnected structure, the parts of which are so co-ordinated that any impulse causes it to be affected as a whole.

<sup>38</sup> Jowett.



must not be supposed to mean that forgetfulness actually occurs at any point of the process ; for forgetting is a loss of memory ; but memory has not yet appeared in the case we are supposing, and it would be strange indeed to talk of losing what is not there and has not yet come into existence, would it not ? *P.* Well ? *S.* Let us simply change the names. *P.* How ? *S.* Instead of saying that the mind is oblivious when it is unaffected by the vibrations of the body, call it, instead of oblivion, unconsciousness.<sup>39</sup> *P.* I understand. *S.* But when the mind and the body experience one impression in common and are set in motion together, this motion may properly be called sensation. *P.* Very true. *S.* We now understand, then, what we mean by sensation. *P.* Yes : what follows ? *S.* Now memory in my opinion may properly be described as a preservation of sensation. *P.* Certainly. *S.* But we must make, must we not, a distinction between memory and recollection ? *P.* Very possibly. *S.* And the distinction will be this. *P.* What ? *S.* When, without the co-operation of the body, the mind recovers in itself as far as it can something it previously experienced in common with the body, then, I think, we say that it is remembering.<sup>40</sup> *P.* Certainly. *S.* And further when it has lost the remembrance of something it has felt or learned and afterwards recovers it again by itself, all such cases we call, I imagine, recollections. *P.* Quite right.

*S.* Now the purpose of all this explanation is as follows. *P.* What ? *S.* To enable us to get the clearest idea of the pleasure of the mind apart from the body, and of desire : for what we have said explains, I think, the nature of both.

<sup>39</sup> The word is *anaisthêsia* (anæsthesia).

<sup>40</sup> The text has "recollect," which is apparently accepted by all the editors. But this obliterates exactly the distinction which Plato is trying to make, and the verb must be emended.—Much of this discussion is not strictly necessary to the argument ; but in all the later dialogues Plato is keenly interested in psychology for its own sake, and takes every opportunity of analysing mental processes, which he does with an acuteness and a feeling for the actual concrete reality that is wholly admirable. It is he and not Aristotle who is the real founder of psychology.

*P.* Well, let us see what follows, Socrates. *S.* There are many things, it seems, that we have to consider in investigating the origin and type of pleasure; for apparently we must still begin by taking desire and ascertaining its nature and conditions. *P.* Let us look into it: we shall lose nothing. *S.* Nay, but we shall lose something: we shall surely lose the puzzle, if we find the answer.<sup>41</sup> *P.* A just correction; let us see what comes next. *S.* Well, we said just now that hunger, thirst, and a number of things of that sort were desires. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Now what is the identity in things so diverse that causes us to give them a single name? *P.* Upon my soul, Socrates, it does not seem easy to answer; but we must answer it somehow. *S.* Let us take up the question from the same point as before. *P.* Where is that? *S.* We mean something definite, do we not, when we say that a man is thirsty? *P.* Of course. *S.* We mean, in fact, he is empty? *P.* Proceed. *S.* Thirst, then, is a desire? *P.* Yes, of drink. *S.* Of drink, or of being replenished with drink? *P.* The 35 replenishment, I think. *S.* The man who is empty, then, apparently desires the opposite of this actual condition; for when empty, he longs to be filled. *P.* Evidently. *S.* What then? Is there any way in which a man who is empty for the first time can apprehend replenishment, either by sensation or memory, seeing that he is neither experiencing it at the time, nor has experienced it previously? <sup>42</sup> *P.* How could he? *S.* And yet a man who desires, desires something, I believe? *P.* Assuredly. *S.* Then it is not what he is experiencing that he desires; for he is thirsty, that is, empty, and what he desires is replenishment? *P.* Yes. *S.* Then some part of the thirsty man somehow apprehends replenishment? *P.* Necessarily. *S.* But it cannot be his body; for that is, by admission, empty. *P.* Yes. *S.* It remains, then, that his mind apprehends replenishment; by memory,

<sup>41</sup> Jowett.

<sup>42</sup> This argument—or part of an argument—is out of place. It is only when the dependence of desire on memory has already been proved that it can be shown that before “replenishment” has actually been experienced there can be no desire.

evidently—for with what else could he apprehend it? *P.* With nothing else apparently.

*S.* Now is it clear what results from all this? *P.* What? *S.* The argument shows that there can be no such thing as a desire of the body. *P.* How? *S.* Because it demonstrates that the impulse of every animal is in such cases opposite to its bodily affections. *P.* Certainly. *S.* And the fact that its instinct leads it in a direction contrary to what it is experiencing proves, I imagine, the presence of a memory of the opposite experience. *P.* Quite so. *S.* Then the argument shows that what leads towards the object of desire is memory, and that therefore impulse and desire and the whole motive principle of the living being is in the mind. *P.* Quite right. *S.* And it shows that it is impossible for our body to be hungry or thirsty or subject to any such affections. *P.* Very true. *S.* And there is this further point to observe in the same connexion. It seems to me that the argument points to a type of life dependent on these processes. *P.* Which processes, and what sort of life do you mean? *S.* That dependent on replenishment and emptiness, and all processes connected with the preservation and destruction of living things, and the pain and pleasure that any of us feels in the course of the changes from one condition to the other. *P.* True.

*S.* And what when he comes to be in the intermediate state? *P.* How do you mean? *S.* When his affections are painful, but he remembers the pleasure which would relieve him from his pain, if it were present, though as yet his want is not being satisfied? What happens then? Shall  
36 we describe him as in the intermediate condition, or not? *P.* Let us say he is. *S.* And as wholly in pain, or in pleasure? *P.* Heaven forbid! but rather suffering a double pain; first in his physical sensations, and then in his mind by the anguish of his expectation. *S.* What do you mean, Protarchus, by the doubling of his pain? Is it not the case that a man who is empty, will have at one time an evident expectation of replenishment, and at another time despair of it? *P.* Assuredly. *S.* Well, do you not think that when he expects replenish-

ment, he feels a reminiscent pleasure, while at the same moment suffering the pain of emptiness? *P.* Necessarily. *S.* Then at such a time a man, and any other animal, feels pain and pleasure simultaneously? *P.* So it seems. *S.* But what when he is both empty and despairs of replenishment? Have we not then that doubling of pain which you noticed just now, and thought it the single case of doubling? *P.* Very true, Socrates.

## § 4

*S.* Now let us apply our investigation of these affections in this way. *P.* How? *S.* Shall we call these pains and pleasures true or false? Or some true, and some not?<sup>43</sup> *P.* But how could pleasures or pains be false, Socrates? *S.* And how can fears be true or false, Protarchus, or expectations true or not, or opinions true or false? *P.* Opinions I would certainly admit, but not pleasure and pain. *S.* What do you mean? I fear we are raising a very large question. *P.* Very true. *S.* But whether it is relevant to what has gone before, son of a famous sire, must be considered. *P.* I suppose it must. *S.* Now we must dismiss all lengthy discussions and any topic at all that is away from our point. *P.* Quite right.

*S.* Tell me, then;—for I must admit that the difficulties we are about to discuss have always been a source of wonder to me. . . . *P.* In what way do you mean? *S.* Pleasures, you say, are not some true and some false? *P.* How could they be? *S.* No one then, according to you, either awake or asleep or in madness or delirium, ever thinks he is feeling pleasure when he is not really feeling it, or thinks he is suffering pain when he is not? *P.* We have always supposed it to be as you say, Socrates. *S.* And are we to take it that you were right? Or ought

<sup>43</sup> The following discussion of the comparative "truth" and "falsity" of pleasures, though full of acute observation, is not as a whole very happy; and in fact, as has been noticed (p. 106), Plato abandons the question later on, and takes up instead the distinction between "pure" and "mixed" pleasures. See note <sup>53</sup> below.

we to discuss whether this view is true or not? *P.* I  
37 should say we ought to discuss it.

*S.* Then let us state this new question about pleasure and pain somewhat more precisely. There is, we are agreed, a definite something which we call opinion? *P.* Yes. *S.* And the same with pleasure? *P.* Yes. *S.* Again, opinion has a definite object? *P.* Of course. *S.* And when pleasure is felt, the pleasure has a definite object likewise? *P.* Certainly. *S.* Now the subject who forms an opinion really has an opinion, whether it is right or wrong? *P.* Of course. *S.* And similarly the subject who feels pleasure really feels the pleasure, whether it is right or wrong? *P.* Yes, that also is true. *S.* Then how can it be that we find opinion to be sometimes true and sometimes false, but pleasure always true, though both opinion and pleasure is equally real? *P.* We must investigate it. *S.* You mean that what we have to investigate is the fact that falsity and truth attach to opinion, so that it becomes not opinion merely, but a specific kind of opinion in each case? *P.* Yes. *S.* And further, that we must decide whether it is the fact that while things in general can be qualified, pleasure and pain are only what they are, and do not admit of qualification? *P.* Clearly.

*S.* But surely it is not difficult to see this at least—that they do admit of qualification. For we said some time ago that both pleasures and pains become great and small and have intensity.<sup>44</sup> *P.* Certainly. *S.* Yes, and if badness attaches to them, Protarchus, we shall say that the opinion consequently becomes bad, and the pleasure bad likewise. *P.* What follows, Socrates? *S.* Again, if correctness or the opposite is implicated in any of them, shall we not call the opinion correct, if it has correctness, and the same with pleasure? *P.* Necessarily. *S.* But if the content of the opinion is erroneous, we must admit that in that case the opinion, being erroneous, is false and falsely conceived. *P.* Of course. *S.* And what if we observe that a pleasure or pain is in error in regard

<sup>44</sup> All this reasoning is evidently ineffective, and too much stress must not be laid on it.

to its object? Are we to call it right or good or any complimentary name? *P.* We cannot;—that is, if we are to admit that pleasure can be in error. *S.* Well, it certainly seems to be the case that we often find pleasure occurring in conjunction, not with true opinion, but with false. *P.* Of course. And we said, Socrates, that then and in such a case the opinion is certainly false; but 38 the pleasure itself no one would ever call false. *S.* Why, you are turning out quite an ardent champion of pleasure, Protarchus! *P.* Not at all; I only say what I hear. *S.* But, my good friend, can we see no difference between the pleasure that is conjoined with true opinion and knowledge, and that which so often arises in us in conjunction with false opinion and ignorance? *P.* One would certainly expect to find a considerable difference. *S.* Then let us proceed to examine this difference. *P.* Take me where you will. *S.* Then I will take you by this road. *P.* Which is that?

*S.* We admit the existence of false and true opinion respectively. *P.* Yes. *S.* These, as we were saying just now, are often followed by pleasure and pain—true and false opinion, I mean. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Does not opinion, and the attempt to discriminate our impressions, spring always from memory and sensation? *P.* Assuredly. *S.* Now does it not appear that the process must necessarily be like this? *P.* What? *S.* A man often sees something far off, and not quite distinctly, and wishes—you will admit—to judge what it is that he sees.<sup>45</sup> *P.* I admit it. *S.* Thereupon he would question himself, would he not, in this way? *P.* How? *S.* “What can that be that I think I see standing there by the rock under a tree?” Do you not suppose he would say this to himself, when something of the kind appears to him? *P.* Well? *S.* And might he not thereupon say to himself in answer, that it is a man, happening by chance on the truth? *P.* Certainly. *S.* Perhaps, too, he might make a mistake, and think what he saw was a figure made by some shepherds,

<sup>45</sup> Here again we have one of those digressions on psychology which are frequent in Plato's later works. See note <sup>40</sup> above.



and call it so. *P.* Quite so. *S.* And if someone is with him he would express what he said to himself in words, and repeat it aloud to his companion, and so what we called in the first instance opinion becomes a statement. *P.* Well? *S.* But if it happens that he is alone and is only thinking it to himself, he may walk on, keeping the same idea in his mind for some time.<sup>46</sup> *P.* Certainly. *S.* What then? Have you the same view of what takes place as I have? *P.* What is that? *S.* Our mind seems to me to be at such times like a book. *P.* In what way?

39 *S.* The memory coincides with the sensations and joins with the impressions of the senses in writing—as I think we may almost say—sentences in our mind; and when what this combined perception<sup>47</sup> writes is true, the result is that true opinions and true judgments are formed in us. But when this clerk—so to call it—writes what is false, the result is the opposite. *P.* I quite agree, and accept your account of the matter.

*S.* Then will you accept the presence of another craftsman at work in our minds at the same time? *P.* Which is he? *S.* A painter, who follows the writer, and paints pictures of what is said in the mind. *P.* Well, what do you mean by him, and when does he work? *S.* When a man abstracts from sight or some other sense what was the subject of his opinions and statements, and sees, as it were, images of it in his mind. Is not this what takes place in us? *P.* Certainly. *S.* And the images of the true opinions and statements are true; and those of the false, false. *P.* Quite so. *S.* Now if what we have said is correct, let us consider the next question. *P.* And that is . . .? *S.* Whether we are bound to be affected in this way in respect of things present and past, and not of things future. *P.* No, I should say in respect of all times alike. *S.* Now did we not say before that the

<sup>46</sup> The point of this is not clear. Perhaps Plato at first intended to speak of the intermediate state of doubt and self-questioning, which he takes to precede opinion or judgment (see *Theaetetus*, 189e-190a), and then changed his mind.

<sup>47</sup> Simply "this affection" in the Greek — a very clumsy expression.

pleasures and pains we feel through the soul alone may occur before those we feel through the body, so that we can have an anticipatory pleasure and an anticipatory pain, which occur with reference to the future? *P.* Very true. *S.* Then the writings and pictures we assumed a moment ago to be produced in us, relate not only to the past and present time, but also, do they not, to the future? *P.* Assuredly. *S.* By "assuredly" you mean that all these are in fact anticipations relating to the future, and that throughout life we are ever full of hopes? *P.* Certainly. *S.* Come now; answer me this further question. *P.* What is it? *S.* A man who is just and pious and in every way good—is he not dear to heaven? *P.* Well? *S.* Well, is not an unjust and altogether evil man the opposite? *P.* Of course. *S.* We were saying 40 just now, were we not, that every man is full of hopes? *P.* No doubt. *S.* And what we call hopes are statements in the minds of each of us? *P.* Yes. *S.* Yes, and the imaginations painted there, too; and often a man will see abundant gold coming into his possession, and many pleasures therewith, and see himself as part of the picture <sup>48</sup> in the height of bliss at his good fortune? *P.* No doubt. *S.* Now of these pictures shall we not say that, for the most part, the good have true ones presented to them because they are loved of heaven? <sup>49</sup> *P.* Assuredly. *S.* And the bad have pleasures pictured in their minds no less; but these, presumably, are false. *P.* Proceed. *S.* Thus the wicked mostly enjoy false pleasures, but the good true. *P.* Necessarily.

*S.* According to the present argument, then, there are such things as false pleasures in men's minds, a parody of the true; and pains in the same manner.<sup>50</sup> *P.* There are.

<sup>48</sup> Badham.

<sup>49</sup> This argument is so trivial that I can only suppose Plato to have written it down merely to fill a momentary gap, and intended to replace it by something a little more to the point.

<sup>50</sup> The preceding digression was apparently designed to show that pleasure is of the same nature as "opinion"—that it is, in fact, a form of judgment, and consequently susceptible of truth and falsity in the same way as other forms of judgment. But

*S.* Now we agreed that when a man conceives any opinion at all, his opinion is always a real opinion, but may relate sometimes to what neither has been nor is nor will be?

*P.* Certainly. *S.* And at such times, as we agreed, I think, the result is that false opinions are conceived and held?

*P.* Yes. *S.* Well must we not attribute an analogous character to pleasures and pains in the same circumstances?

*P.* How? *S.* I mean that when a man enjoys anything at all in any way, his enjoyment is always a real enjoyment, but may relate to what neither is, nor has been, and often—perhaps more often than not—to what never will be.

*P.* This, too, must necessarily be so, Socrates. *S.* The same argument will hold good, will it not, about fear, anger and all such feelings—that all these, too, are sometimes false? *P.* Certainly.

*S.* Now can we call an opinion bad except when it is false? *P.* No. *S.* Nor, I imagine, can we see any  
 41 other way in which pleasures are bad except by being false. *P.* Quite the contrary, Socrates. I should have said that it is not falsity at all that makes pains and pleasures bad, but the association of them with evil of quite another sort, and that great and multifarious. *S.* Well, the bad pleasures—those the badness of which is due to evil—we will discuss a little later on, if it still seems necessary; but for the present we must consider another form of false pleasures, which are numerous and of frequent occurrence in us. For this is a point that we may find useful in our final judgment. *P.* No doubt—if there really are such pleasures. *S.* In my view, at any rate, Protarchus, there are. And as long as this opinion is fixed in my mind, we can hardly, I think, leave it unexamined. *P.* I agree.

the argument evidently breaks down. The pictures of the imagination are rightly classed with the “sentences,” which constitute perception, but they are not themselves the pleasure that they excite. All that is really shown is, that one may have pleasures the object of which is unreal; which was never denied. Plato now practically admits that the analysis has led to nothing, though he persists in calling such pleasures “false.”

## § 5

*S.* Then let us once more get to grips with this question like wrestlers. *P.* I am with you. *S.* Well, we said a little while ago, if you remember, that when what we call desires are present in us, the body has different impressions from those of the mind, and is disconnected with it. *P.* I remember; that was what we said. *S.* What feels desire is, we said, the mind—it desires conditions opposite to those of the body—while the pleasure or pain that is felt comes from the body and is caused by its affections. *P.* True. *S.* Now consider what is happening in such a case. *P.* Explain. *S.* You will see that when this is the state of affairs we have pleasures and pains present together and simultaneously, and the sensations from the two opposite sources appear side by side, as we showed just now. *P.* It seems so certainly. *S.* Did we not also originally assent to this further statement? *P.* What was that? *S.* That both—I mean pleasure and pain—admit of the more and less and belong to the unlimited class. *P.* We said so: what then?

*S.* Now what means are there of judging these things correctly? *P.* Which things do you mean? *S.* I mean, if it is the object of our judgment in such cases to decide at any time which is greater and which smaller, which more, and which intenser, comparing pain with pleasure, pain with pain, and pleasure with pleasure. *P.* Well, that is so, and the object of our judgment is as you say. *S.* What then? In the case of sight the greater or less distance from which we see disguises the truth and gives us 42 false opinions; and surely in the case of pleasure and pain we shall find the same thing happening, shall we not? *P.* Indeed we shall, Socrates, and much more so.

*S.* Our present result is the opposite of that which we reached a moment ago. *P.* Which result do you mean? *S.* Then it was the truth or falsity attaching to the opinions which affected the pleasures and pains with the same quality. *P.* Very true. *S.* But now it is they themselves that are affected by being surveyed from near

or far, as they change from time to time ; and also by being compared, when the pleasures appear greater and more intense contrasted with what is painful ; and the pains again, by being contrasted with the pleasures have their opposite qualities enhanced. *P.* This can only be so, and for the reasons you have given. *S.* Then I think you ought to cut off so much of the apparent greatness or smallness of either as exceeds their real proportions, and is only an appearance, not a reality ; and declare it to be a delusion and refuse to admit that the portion of the pleasure or pain thence accruing is right and true.<sup>51</sup> *P.* No, it is not.

*S.* Now in the next place let us see if, in the following way, we cannot discover pleasures and pains, appearing and existing in living things, which are more false still.<sup>52</sup>

*P.* What are they, and how do you mean ? *S.* It has been said, I think, more than once, that when the natural structure of the particular being is destroyed by concretions and dissociations, fillings and emptyings, and various forms of increase and decrease, pains and achings and pangs and all such things come to be felt. *P.* Yes, this has been said more than once. *S.* Yes, and when on the other hand there is a return to the natural structure, this readjustment we

<sup>51</sup> See note <sup>56</sup> below.

<sup>52</sup> The course of the argument in the next few pages is very rambling. First, we are given another proof of the possibility of the "third life," which contains neither pleasure nor pain. It follows that the Cynics (?), who define pleasure simply as the absence of pain, are mistaken ; and the fact that absence of pain gives them pleasure is, in fact, another example of unreal pleasure. Nevertheless, their distrust of the intenser forms of enjoyment is founded on a sound instinct. These intenser forms will, if we analyse them, give us the truest insight into the nature of physical pleasures in general. They are morbid in origin, and characterised by an admixture of pain.—After this the whole discussion turns on the distinction between mixed and pure pleasures, which replaces that between their truth and falsity. It is surely evident that, when writing the present passage, Plato had not yet clearly in mind what was to follow ; for the pleasures that are "more false still" can only be the intense pleasures of 45a *sqq.*, whereas those which are actually taken next are the false pleasures of those who believe pleasure to be identical with absence of pain. And when we finally reach the intense pleasures Plato forgets to demonstrate their peculiar falsity altogether.

have agreed with ourselves to be pleasure. *P.* Quite right. *S.* Now what when neither change is in process in our bodies?

*P.* But when would that happen, Socrates? *S.* The question you have asked is not to the point, Protarchus. *P.* Why, pray? *S.* Because it does not prevent me from asking my question again. *P.* What question? *S.* Let us suppose, Protarchus, I shall say, that nothing of the sort happens; what would necessarily be the result to us? *P.* You mean, if the body were not moved in either direction? *S.* I do. *P.* Well, it is evident, Socrates, that in such a case neither pleasure nor pain would occur at all. *S.* Excellent. But your opinion is, I suppose, that something of the sort must always be happening, as the philosophers say<sup>53</sup>: for everything is ever flowing upward and downward. *P.* That is what they say certainly, and there seems to be some sense in it. *S.* And naturally, since they are men of sense themselves. However, this threatens to raise a question which I would rather evade; and I propose to evade it in this way—and you had better join me in my flight. *P.* Tell me how. *S.* “Be this as it may,” let us say to these theorists. . . . But let me put the question to you:—Is everything that happens to a living being felt by the patient, and are we, for instance, aware of our growth and every such change that happens to us? Or is it quite otherwise? *P.* Quite otherwise, for in fact we are conscious of hardly any such things. *S.* Then we were wrong in what we said just now, that the changes that take place upward and downward produce pains and pleasures. *P.* What then? *S.* It will be better and less open to objection, if we put it in this way. *P.* How? *S.* That considerable changes give us pleasure and pain, while those that are only moderate or quite small have neither effect at all. *P.* That would be a better statement than the other, Socrates.

*S.* Now if this is so, we come back again to the life of which we spoke just now. *P.* And that is . . .? *S.* The life we pronounced to be painless and joyless. *P.*

<sup>53</sup> *i.e.* the school of Heraclitus.



Quite true. *S.* Accordingly let us assume three lives, one pleasurable, one painful and one neither. Do you disagree? *P.* No, I agree that there are three lives, as you say. *S.* Then the absence of pain cannot be identical with pleasure. *P.* Evidently not. *S.* Now when you are told that it is the sweetest thing of all to pass one's whole life without pain, what do you take it that the man who says so<sup>54</sup> really means? *P.* I suppose he means that the absence of pain is pleasure. *S.* Then take three things—whatever you please—or, to use more sounding names, let us call one gold, the other silver, and a third neither gold nor silver.<sup>55</sup> *P.* Very well. *S.* Now can the one which is neither ever become either of the other two, gold or silver? *P.* Of course not. *S.* Then the middle life can in no sense be rightly described as either pleasant or painful; and whoever thinks or says so, thinks and says what is, according to the right view of the matter, incorrect. *P.* Evidently. *S.* And yet, my friend,  
 44 we know of people who say and think so. *P.* We do indeed. *S.* They think then that they are feeling pleasure when they are merely not feeling pain. *P.* So at least they say. *S.* Surely they do really think that they are feeling pleasure; for otherwise, I imagine, they would not say so. *P.* I suppose so. *S.* Then, you see, they have a false opinion about pleasure, if it is true that pleasure and the absence of pain are wholly distinct in nature. *P.* Well, we certainly agreed that they are distinct.<sup>56</sup>

*S.* Then which view are we to adopt—that there are three, as we said just now, or two only, pain, an evil to mankind, and on the other side the release from pain, which is in itself a good and constitutes what we call pleasure? *P.* Why are we asking ourselves this question now, Socrates? I do not understand.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See note <sup>53</sup> below.

<sup>55</sup> The purpose of this escapes me.

<sup>56</sup> We have then three types of "false pleasure": pleasures arising from delusions or erroneous anticipations (36e, 40a sqq.), pleasures exaggerated by comparison with pains (42a sqq.), and mere absence of pain, that is thought, on a wrong theory, to be pleasure. Evidently this is a very incomplete and heterogeneous list, and hardly to be regarded as the out-

*S.* The truth is, Protarchus, that you do not understand these opponents of our friend Philebus. *P.* And whom do you mean by them? *S.* Persons reputed to be adepts in the investigation of nature, who deny the existence of pleasures altogether.<sup>58</sup> *P.* What then? *S.* They say that what the school of Philebus call pleasures are one and all forms of escape from pain. *P.* And do you advise us to accept their opinion, Socrates? Or what do you say? *S.* I do not, but I think we should use them, so to say, as seers, who divine, not through any process of art, but by the promptings of a certain intolerance of disposition, that has something of nobility in it—men whose overmastering hatred of the power of pleasure has brought them to think that it is altogether rotten, in its very nature a meretricious quackery, and not pleasure at all. This then is the use that I would have you make of them; and when you have considered the rest of their objections, you shall hear what pleasures I regard as true, so that we may examine the properties of pleasure from both points of view, and take account of them in our final judgment.<sup>59</sup> *P.* Quite right.

*S.* Let us make these philosophers our allies, and follow the trail of their intolerance. I imagine them to start with a general principle in their minds, and to mean something like this:—if we wanted to see the true nature of any class, as for instance of hardness, should we understand it better by looking at the hardest things, or those of which

come of Plato's maturest reflexion. The underlying idea is, as has been said, that pleasure is somehow a form of judgment; that it is not "immediate," but partakes of the nature of an inference. It is a pity that the theory was not more fully worked out. In what circumstances would one be justified in saying that such-and-such a sensation is not really pleasant though others find it so? Is there a right and a wrong in physical pleasures as there certainly is in æsthetic pleasures?

<sup>57</sup> It will be seen that the transition is very awkwardly effected.

<sup>58</sup> It was generally taken for granted that these were the Cynics. But "we are expressly told that Antisthenes abstained from physical speculation" (Poste, quoted by Bury); and Natorp and others suppose Plato to mean Democritus and the Atomists.

<sup>59</sup> This reads exactly as if Plato realised that he was losing the thread, and wished to remind himself of what was to follow

the hardness is infinitesimal? <sup>60</sup> Protarchus, you must answer the questions of these intolerant sages just as you do mine. *P.* Certainly; and my answer to them is, that it must be the largest examples. *S.* If, then, we wish to see what is the essential nature of the class pleasure, we must look, not at minute pleasures, but at those which are considered the extremest and most intense. *P.* Everyone would agree with you in that. *S.* Now if, as we have said several times, the commonest pleasures are also the greatest, it is to the pleasures of the body we must look. *P.* No doubt. *S.* Do we find these, then, to be and become greater in the case of those that are sick and diseased, or of those who are well? And let us take care not to answer too precipitately, lest we make a false step. We might for instance say, in the case of those who are well? *P.* Yes, that seems probable. *S.* Well, are not the extremest pleasures those that are preceded by the strongest desires? *P.* That certainly is true. *S.* But do not people who are attacked by fever and such disorders feel thirst and cold and all the bodily affections more intensely, and suffer wants more acutely, and feel greater pleasure when their wants are satisfied? Shall we not say that this is true? *P.* Certainly, now you have mentioned it, it seems to be so. *S.* Then should we, in your opinion, be right in saying that if one wishes to see the greatest pleasures, he must turn not to health but to disease in order to find them? And mark; you must not take my question to be, whether those who are very ill have a greater number of pleasures than those in health; you must understand that I wish to know where it is that magnitude and intensity of pleasure at a given moment is to be found. For we regard it as necessary that we should ascertain what its nature is, and what it is held to be by those who assert that pleasure has no real existence at all. *P.* I think I follow you. *S.* That, Protarchus, we shall shortly see. For answer me this: do you find that pleasures are greater—

<sup>60</sup> This seems to be a stretch of imagination. Certainly nothing has been said which would lead one to infer that this is the way in which the Cynics (or Atomists) arrived at their conclusion.

I do not mean more numerous, but superior as to magnitude and intensity—in ungoverned licence, or in a life of self-restraint? Pay heed to your answer. *P.* Ah, I understand your point; and indeed I see a great difference: for the temperate are ever held in check by their obedience to the proverbial warning that enjoins “nothing over-much!”—while as for the senseless and wanton, the intensity of pleasure grips them to the point of madness, and makes them frantic.<sup>61</sup> *S.* Very good: and if this is indeed so, it is evident that it is in some evil condition of mind and body, and not in virtue, that the greatest pleasures and the greatest pains, too, occur. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Then we must choose some examples and try to see what there is about them that makes us call them the greatest.<sup>62</sup> *P.* We must.

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*S.* Then let us see what is the nature of the pleasures connected with such maladies as these. *P.* Which? *S.* The pleasures from unseemly maladies which the men we call intolerant detest. *P.* Which are they? *S.* For instance, the cure by rubbing of irritation and such things that need no other remedy. How, in Heaven’s name, are we to describe the occurrence in us of such conditions? As pleasure or as pain? *P.* This seems to be a villainous mixture<sup>63</sup> of some kind, Socrates. *S.* I certainly did not introduce the subject with an eye to Philebus: but unless we discern the nature of these pleasures and those consequent on them, Protarchus, we should hardly be able to decide our question. *P.* Then let us proceed to the related pleasures. *S.* Those that belong to the mixed class, you mean? *P.* Certainly. *S.* Well, the mixtures occur, some in the body and in the body alone, some in the soul and in the soul alone, and again we shall find mixtures of pleasure and pain in

<sup>61</sup> Badham.

<sup>62</sup> Strictly speaking, what we want to see is not what makes them greatest, but what makes them pleasurable.—The succeeding passage is as terrible a piece of “realism” as one could well imagine. It is prefaced by an amazing insult to “Philebus,” and the whole treatment has a note of personal abhorrence, which gives it a peculiar intensity. There can be few passages in literature less pleasant to read.

<sup>63</sup> Jowett.

soul and body together, which as a whole are called in some cases pleasure, and in others pain. *P.* How is this? *S.* When a man is in a state of dissolution or readjustment, and under the influence of both affections—when he is, for instance, cold and growing warm, or, as it may be, hot and cooling, and trying, doubtless, to retain one condition and get rid of the other, this “bitter-sweet” state, so to call it, and the difficulty of shaking it off, causes a feeling of discomfort followed by a violent tension.

*P.* A very true description. *S.* Now in these mixtures the pleasures and pains are sometimes equal, are they not, and sometimes one or the other preponderates? *P.* Of course. *S.* Well, you must understand that those in which the pains are more than the pleasures are those of irritation, which I mentioned just now, and those of tickling, when the part that is fevered and inflamed is within and one cannot reach it by rubbing and scratching, but can only dissipate what is on the surface: then men put the part affected into fire and into extreme cold, changing about distractedly, and create in themselves inwardly sometimes immense pleasures, and sometimes on the contrary, by the contrast between their inward and outward sensations, pains mixed with pleasures, according as either predominates, when they violently disperse what is con-

47 gested or congest what is dispersed, and so mingle pain with pleasure. *P.* Very true. *S.* Then when in all such cases the pleasurable element in the ingredient is the greater, the slight seasoning of pain acts as an irritation and gentle discomfort, while the much greater infusion of pleasure strains the nerves and sometimes makes the patient jump, and he displays every variety of complexion, attitude and breathing, and seems beside himself, and utters senseless cries. *P.* Indeed he does. *S.* And it makes him, and others too, say that these pleasures almost kill him with delight; and these are the pleasures he is always pursuing, and the more so, the more uncontrolled and senseless the man happens to be, and he calls them the greatest pleasures of all, and counts him most blessed among mortals who lives in the enjoyment of them every moment he can. *P.* Socrates, you have de-



scribed what one finds in the case of most men very fairly.

*S.* That is, Protarchus, as regards the pleasures of the body alone, which arise from a mixture of the inward and outward feelings; but as regards those occurring when the soul contributes feelings contrary to those of the body—pain contrasted with pleasure, and pleasure with pain, and both uniting to form one compound—these we have already described, and have pointed out that when a man is empty he desires replenishment, and feels pleasure in his anticipation, but pain in his emptiness; but we did not adduce them as instances of our argument, and must now observe that in all these cases, which are innumerable, the soul being at variance with the body, one composite feeling of pleasure and pain results.<sup>64</sup> *P.* I think this is perfectly accurate.

## § 6

*S.* We have one form of mixed pleasure and pain still left. *P.* Which do you mean? *S.* The compound which we said the soul often feels in and by itself. *P.* Well, and how are we to describe this? *S.* Take anger, fear, desire, mourning, love, emulation, envy and all such feelings—would you not say that these are pains felt by the soul itself? *P.* Yes, I should. *S.* Now shall we not find these full of immense pleasures, or do we need to be reminded of the lines “wrath which makes even a wise man angry and is sweeter than honey dropping from the hive,”<sup>65</sup> or of the pleasures that are to be found in laments and longings, mixed with pain? *P.* No; it is so undoubtedly. *S.* Moreover, you remember the crowds at the theatre who weep in the midst of their enjoyment. *P.* Of course. *S.* And do you know that at comedies our state of mind exhibits a mixture of pleasure and pain? *P.* I do not

<sup>64</sup> An attempt to pick up the scattered threads. It will be seen that the distinction between true and false pleasures has for some time been forgotten. It is suddenly reintroduced at the beginning of § 7.

<sup>65</sup> Homer.



quite understand. *S.* No, it is not easy, Protarchus, to discern that this kind of feeling is always present in such cases. *P.* It certainly does not seem easy to me. *S.* Let us look into it all the more because it is obscure, so that it may be easier to discern the mixture of pleasure and pain in other cases. *P.* Proceed.

*S.* Well, you will agree, I suppose, that envy,<sup>66</sup> which we mentioned just now, is a pain of the soul?

*P.* Yes. *S.* And yet we shall find the envious man taking pleasure in the misfortunes of his neighbours?

*P.* Very much so. *S.* Now ignorance, and what we call fatuity, is a misfortune. *P.* Well? *S.* Consider then, on this basis, what is the essence of the ridiculous. *P.* Proceed.

*S.* Speaking generally, it is a kind of evil condition, and is the name given to a certain habit of mind; it is a particular kind of evil condition which has a character opposite to that enjoined by the inscription at Delphi.

*P.* You mean "know thyself," Socrates? *S.* I do; and the opposite to that would evidently be that the inscription should bid one not to know oneself at all. *P.* What then?

*S.* Now try to make a triple division here, Protarchus.

*P.* How do you mean? I doubt if I could. *S.* I suppose you mean that I must do it this time? *P.* Yes,

and what is more I beg you to do it. *S.* Well, when people do not know themselves, must it not be in one of three ways? *P.* How? *S.* First in regard to riches, that they should think themselves richer than they really are. *P.* Certainly there are a good many people affected in that way. *S.* Yes, but more still who think themselves

<sup>66</sup> It will be seen that "envy" is not here a suitable translation of the Greek word, which is not limited to the feeling of grudging one's neighbour the possession of something desirable, but includes pleasure in another's misfortunes—"Schadenfreude" as the Germans call it. It is in this aspect that Plato makes it the essence of the feeling for comedy. But is it then a "mixed" pleasure? Envy in the usual sense is, no doubt, a "pain of the soul," but in the sense in which it is here used it seems to connote pleasure simply. I am inclined to think that Plato is, deliberately or not, confusing the two senses. The result of the discussion is highly ingenious, but, as throughout the *Philebus*, the method of argument is clumsy and unnatural.

taller and more beautiful and superior in all personal attractions to their true selves. *P.* Very true. *S.* But by far the most of all, I imagine, are deceived in the third point, their minds, and think themselves more virtuous than they are. *P.* Most assuredly. *S.* And of all the virtues is it not to wisdom that the majority of people cling 49 at all costs, till they are full of quarrelsomeness and false conceit of wisdom? *P.* Of course. *S.* Such a state of mind may very well be considered wholly a misfortune. *P.* Indeed it may. *S.* Now here we must again make a division, if we are to see the true nature of this childish envy and discern the mixture of pleasure and pain in it. How is it to be divided, you say? *P.* Yes. *S.* Among all who are foolish enough to have this false opinion about themselves, as among mankind in general, there will necessarily be some who are possessed of strength and power, and some, I presume, the reverse. *P.* Necessarily. *S.* Divide them, then, on these lines; and those who are such as we described, and in addition weak and unable to retaliate when they are laughed at, you may call with truth ridiculous; but those who can retaliate and are strong, it will be quite accurate to class as formidable and hateful. For the self-ignorance of the strong is indeed hateful and vile; for it is harmful to others both in reality and in fiction; but weak self-ignorance is naturally to be classed with the things that are ridiculous. *P.* Very true. But I must say that I still do not see the mixture of pleasure and pain in all this.

*S.* Well, consider first the properties of envy. *P.* Proceed. *S.* It is, I imagine, an unjust feeling both painful and pleasant. *P.* That is undeniable. *S.* Now to rejoice at the misfortunes of one's enemies is neither wrong nor envious, is it? *P.* Well? *S.* But it is wrong, surely, to feel not pain but pleasure when one chances to see the misfortunes of one's friends? *P.* Of course. *S.* And we said, did we not, that self-ignorance was a misfortune to everyone? *P.* Quite rightly. *S.* Then in the case of our friends the false wisdom, false beauty, and other self-ignorance that we described as taking three forms, and as being ridiculous when weak, but detestable when strong—of this state of

mind, when it occurs in one of our friends, we may say, may we not, that, in the form in which it is harmless to others, it is ridiculous? *P.* Certainly. *S.* But we agree that, being self-ignorance, it is a misfortune? *P.* Assuredly. *S.* Now do we feel pleasure or pain when we  
 50 laugh at it? *P.* Pleasure, evidently. *S.* But did we not say that it was envy that caused one to feel pleasure at one's friends' misfortunes? *P.* It must be. *S.* Then, according to this argument, when we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, we mix pleasure with envy, that is, pleasure with pain; for we agreed some time ago that envy is a mental pain, and laughter is a pleasure, and the two occur together at such times.<sup>67</sup> *P.* True. *S.* The argument, then, indicates to us that in laments and tragedies too, not only on the stage but in the whole tragedy and comedy of life,<sup>68</sup> pains are mixed with our pleasures; and so in innumerable other instances. *P.* No one could help admitting it, Socrates, however anxious he might be to contradict.

*S.* Well, we began by mentioning anger and longing and lamentation and fear and love and jealousy and envy and all such feelings, in which we said that we should find a combination of the elements so often mentioned, did we not? *P.* Yes. *S.* Now it will be seen that all our discussion just now has been about grief, envy and anger. *P.* Of course. *S.* But there are many others remaining? *P.* Yes, indeed. *S.* Now why do you suppose that I demonstrated the mixture of feelings in the case of comedy? Was it not as evidence that it would be easy to demonstrate the mixture in fear and love and the rest,<sup>69</sup> so that, with

<sup>67</sup> Plato seems to have forgotten that he began by describing envy as a mixture of pleasure and pain.

<sup>68</sup> A literal translation. The phrase has a singularly modern sound. The Greeks were generally too interested in life to view it in this distant and ironical way.

<sup>69</sup> This can hardly be accepted. The discussion of comedy gave no hint of a general theory of "mixed pleasures in the soul." Indeed, as has been said, the presence of an admixture of pain is by no means clearly brought out. No doubt Plato intended to make large additions to this section of the dialogue at a later opportunity.

this assurance, you might release me from the duty of taking up them, too, and so protracting the discussion, and might simply accept the statement that both the body apart from the soul, and the soul apart from the body, and the two in conjunction, are full of instances of pleasure intermixed with pain ? So tell me, will you let me off now, or keep me here till midnight ? I imagine you will release me without much entreaty, for I will gladly account to you for all the other cases to-morrow ; but now I must set sail after the other questions that we must settle in view of the judgment that Philebus enjoins. *P.* Quite right, Socrates ; discuss what remains as you think fit.

## § 7

*S.* Then in the natural order of things after the mixed pleasures we are bound, I think, to proceed to the unmixed. *P.* Quite right. *S.* I will try then to indicate these to you 51 in their turn. I am not quite of the same opinion as those who hold that all pleasures are a cessation of pain ; but, as I said, I use their theory as evidence that there are some pleasures which exist in appearance only and not in reality, and others, great and numerous to all seeming, which are, however, perplexed states of body and mind in which pains and cessations of extreme anguish are complicated together. *P.* And what are the pleasures that one may rightly regard as true, Socrates ? *S.* Those connected with the colours and the forms that we call beautiful, and most of the pleasures of odours, and those of sound, and all in which the wants are imperceptible and painless and the replenishments perceptible and pleasant and unadulterated with pain. *P.* And what is meant by this, Socrates ?

*S.* What I mean is certainly not evident at first sight ; but I must try to explain it. The beauty of form that I am trying to describe is not what most people would suppose, as, for instance, that of living creatures, or pictures ; but I mean, says the argument, a straight line, for instance, and a circle, and the figures produced from them by turning lathes, both surfaces and solids,

and those formed with rulers and angles—if you follow me.<sup>70</sup> For these I hold to be not relatively beautiful, as other things are, but always essentially beautiful in themselves, and to have pleasures peculiar to themselves—very different indeed from the pleasures of scratching! And I mean colours, too, that have the same type of beauty and pleasures of the same kind. Do I make myself clear, or not? *P.* I try to follow, Socrates; but will you, for your part, try to put it a little more clearly? *S.* Well I mean, for instance, that the sounds of musical notes that are smooth and clear and send forth one pure tone are beautiful, not in relation to something else, but

<sup>70</sup> All this discussion of the æsthetic pleasures is of the utmost significance for the proper comprehension of Plato's view of beauty. As here sketched out his ideal will seem very austere, not to say meagre. The simplest geometrical forms, pure colours, clear and smooth monotonous hardly exhaust one's notion of the beautiful nowadays. And indeed it must not be supposed that Plato intends the summary to be complete. At 64e beauty is identified with "symmetry"—which is here only represented by the geometrical figures. Of the three determinations into which the concept of the good is ultimately analysed (and the good, to Plato, if not identical with the beautiful, is at least coextensive with it) it is "truth" and "measure," purity and avoidance of excess, that predominate in the present passage. The exclusion of "living creatures and pictures" only means that nothing individual or personal can be the object of pure æsthetic feeling. There can be no question that Plato would regard the type or Idea of a living creature as essentially beautiful; and a picture or an animal would be beautiful according to its success in representing the type purely and adequately. But in its very exaggeration the passage gives one an admirably vivid impression of the Greek theory of beauty. The form is everything; the matter, nothing. Clearness, accuracy and sobriety (in the sense of *justesse*, of striking the happy mean), and balance of parts—these are the three cardinal principles. Variety, force, character—all the qualities of romantic, as opposed to classical art—are regarded either as not essential or as actually unæsthetic. The modern notion of style as the expression of personality is a thing unknown: to a Greek there is only one style—the beautiful.—The course of the argument in this section is quite straightforward, except that the distinction between the pleasures of the sense of beauty, and other pleasures, which are pure only because the pain from which they are the reaction is imperceptible, is not as clearly marked as it might be. (See also note <sup>72</sup> below.)

absolutely, and arouse pleasures that are essentially their own. *P.* Yes, that is also true. *S.* But the class of pleasures associated with odours is less divine; yet the fact that there is no unavoidable pain mixed with them, makes them, and every similar pleasure of which the same may be said, analogous, in my opinion, to the former class. These then, if you understand me, are two classes of pleasures. *P.* I understand.

*S.* And let us further add the pleasures of study, if, as I think, they do not imply a hunger for knowledge or a feeling of pain resulting from it. *P.* I think so, too. *S.* Again, 52 when people who are full of learning suffer the loss of it through forgetfulness, can you see any pain in the process? *P.* Not naturally, true; but as a result of reflexion, when one loses knowledge and is pained by the need of it. *S.* Yes, but, my good friend, we are now discussing simply the natural feelings, apart from reflexion. *P.* Well, you are certainly right, then, in saying that the forgetting of what one has learned is a painless process. *S.* These pleasures of learning, then, we must class as unalloyed with pain, and as the pleasures, not of the many, but of the very few. *P.* No doubt we must. *S.* Now having made a fairly satisfactory distinction between the pure pleasures on the one hand, and on the other those which may reasonably be classed as impure, we can, I think, describe the intense pleasures as immoderate, and those that are not, as moderate; and those that admit of indefinite magnitude and intensity, and occur with greater or less frequency, we should put in the unlimited class, as consisting in motion of varying degrees through body and soul; and those that do not, into the class of things determined by measure.<sup>71</sup> *P.* Quite right, Socrates.

<sup>71</sup> We have here the first of the three determinations of the concept of the good—viz. measure, symmetry, and truth. The notion of measure, which is discussed at some length in the *Politicus*, is that of the mean between two extremes. The use made of it in Aristotle's *Ethics*, where each virtue is defined as the mean between two opposite vices, is well known. Symmetry is not introduced until we come to the combination of the elements of the ideal life. Truth is explained in the following passage as freedom from alloy.



*S.* Next, there is this further point to be considered in connexion with them. *P.* What is that? *S.* How ought we to class them from the point of view of truth—purity and freedom from alloy, or intensity and frequency and magnitude and sufficiency? *P.* What is the object of your question, Socrates? *S.* I want, Protarchus, to leave no part of pleasure and knowledge unexamined, with a view to determining if in each case there is a part that is pure and a part that is not pure, in order that each may come up for judgment in a pure form, and make the decision easier for you and for me and for all who are present. *P.* Quite right. *S.* Come then, let us look in general at the kinds of things that we call pure, and choose one example first for examination. *P.* And  
 53 what shall that be? *S.* Let us look at whiteness first, if you will. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Now how would one speak of purity in the case of whiteness, and what does it mean? Is it the greatest quantity and mass of colour, or that which is most unadulterated, that is, has no particle of another colour in it? *P.* Evidently that which is unadulterated. *S.* Right; and is it not this that we should call the truest white, Protarchus, and the most beautiful of all whites, and not that which is greatest in amount? *P.* Most certainly. *S.* Then we should be entirely right in saying that a little white that is pure is superior to a quantity that is mixed both in whiteness, in beauty and in truth?<sup>72</sup> *P.* Absolutely. *S.* Well then, I imagine that we shall have no need of a multitude of such instances for our argument about pleasure, and that the present example is enough to make us see that in general a small or infrequent pleasure that is un-

<sup>72</sup> Here again we have one aspect of the Greek notion of beauty sharply outlined. The notion of "truth" as here developed is hardly distinguishable from that of perfection. No inequalities, nothing uneven, incoherent or inharmonious can be tolerated. Beauty implies a smooth and perfect level of attainment throughout. This essentially æsthetic criterion Plato applies to pleasure as a whole; and rightly. Whatever the scale of measurement—whether it is by intensity, volume, or purity of feeling that pleasures are to be compared—one superior pleasure has a higher value, looking at life as a whole, than any number of pleasures that are in any degree inferior.

mixed with pain will be superior to a great or frequent pleasure in pleasantness, in truth, and in beauty. *P.* Certainly; and the example is quite sufficient.

*S.* Here is another point for you.<sup>73</sup> You have possibly heard it said about pleasure that it is invariably a process of becoming, and that there is no such thing as a true being of pleasure. There are some ingenious philosophers<sup>74</sup> who try to make this view clear to us; and they deserve our gratitude. *P.* In what way? *S.* I will explain the point by asking you a question, my friend Protarchus. *P.* Ask what you please. *S.* Let us assume two classes, that which exists absolutely, and that which is ever striving after something else. *P.* What are we to understand by those? *S.* One ever in its nature majestic, and the other inferior to it. *P.* Put it more clearly. *S.* We have seen, I imagine, noble and beautiful striplings, and their manly lovers? *P.* Indeed we have. *S.* Well, you must look for two classes corresponding to these two throughout the whole of what we call existence. *P.* Shall I say it a third time? Please explain more clearly what you mean, Socrates. *S.* Nothing so very complicated, Protarchus. The argument is teasing us, and only means that one kind of existence is that which exists for the sake of something else, and the other kind is that for the sake of which all the first class comes into being.

<sup>73</sup> The discussion of pleasure ends with a sudden flight of metaphysics. Pleasure, like every other mode of motion, belongs to the category of "becoming"; it is a phenomenal process, and presupposes, therefore, an end, for everything in this world of change is a movement towards an end, towards permanence and reality—that is, towards the Idea. The passage is, if anything, more vaguely and loosely argued than any we have yet had. Strictly speaking, pleasure is not in itself a process towards a form of being; it is the feeling accompanying such a process—accompanying, that is, the reaction of the organism towards its type. There can no more be an Idea of physical pleasure in the true sense than there can be of pain.

<sup>74</sup> "This is usually understood, as by Poste, Stallbaum, and Trendelenburg, to refer to Aristippus and the Cyrenaic school: Badham suggests that the Heracliteans and Protagoreans may be included . . . Peipers suggests the Atomists . . . ; Reinhardt, Euclides."—Bury.

*P.* After all these repetitions I barely understand. *S.* But maybe, my boy, we shall understand better as the  
54 argument proceeds. *P.* No doubt.

*S.* Then let us take these two further classes. *P.* Which? *S.* One, becoming, and the other, being, in all things. *P.* Well, I accept them, both being and becoming. *S.* Quite right. Now which are we to say is for the sake of the other? Is it that becoming takes place for the sake of being, or that being is for the sake of becoming? *P.* You want to know if what is called being is what it is for the sake of becoming? *S.* Apparently. *P.* Good heavens, can it be that you are asking me something like this—"Tell me, Protarchus, whether you think that shipbuilding takes place for the sake of ships, rather than that ships exist for the sake of shipbuilding?"—and similarly in all such cases? *S.* That is exactly my meaning, Protarchus. *P.* Then why not answer your own question, Socrates? *S.* I may just as well; but you must take your share in the discussion. *P.* Certainly.

*S.* I say then that medicines and all tools and all material are provided to all for the sake of becoming, and that every sort of becoming takes place for the sake of a particular being, and that becoming in general takes place for the sake of being in general. *P.* That is quite clear. *S.* Now if pleasure is a becoming, it must necessarily take place for the sake of some being. *P.* Well? *S.* Well, that for the sake of which a becoming takes place belongs to the category of the good, while that which becomes for the sake of something else must be classed, my good friend, under a different category altogether. *P.* Inevitably. *S.* If then pleasure is a becoming we shall be right in putting it under some other category than that of the good. *P.* Yes, quite right. *S.* Thus, as I said at the beginning of this argument the man who indicated that there is only a becoming of pleasure, and no being at all, deserves our gratitude; for it is evident that he means to deride those who say that pleasure is a good. *P.* Certainly.

*S.* Moreover he will deride all those who find self-fulfil-

ment in processes of becoming. *P.* Why, what people do you mean? *S.* All those who find their pleasure in curing hunger and thirst, or the other needs that are cured by a process of becoming, and regard the process itself as pleasure, and assert that they would not choose to live without being hungry and thirsty and other things of that nature, and experiencing what follows such conditions. *P.* That certainly seems to be their idea. *S.* 55 Now we should all agree that ceasing to be is the opposite of becoming. *P.* Necessarily. *S.* Then the man who chooses this mode of life would be choosing a continual ceasing and coming to be, instead of the third life we mentioned, in which it was possible to feel neither pleasure nor pain, but to think the purest thoughts. *P.* It seems that there is no little unreason, Socrates, in declaring pleasure to be a good. *S.* There is indeed, as we may see in the following way, too. *P.* How? *S.* Is it not contrary to reason there should be neither beauty nor good in the body or in anything else, but only in the soul, and that there the only good is pleasure, and that courage or self-control or reason or any other virtue of the soul should be nothing of the sort; and further, that one should be forced to affirm that a man who is feeling pain and not pleasure, be he even the best of men, is bad so long as he is feeling pain; and that the man who is feeling pleasure, so long as he feels it, and the more that he feels it, is so much the more and so long pre-eminent in virtue? *P.* All this, Socrates, is the very height of unreason.

### III

#### INTELLECT

#### § 8

*S.* We must not however have the appearance of trying to subject pleasure to all manner of tests, but being very tender with reason and knowledge. We must sound them with a will, and see if there is anything in them that rings

false, so that we may discern what is by nature the purest part of them and use their truest<sup>75</sup> constituents with those of pleasure for the purpose of our decision. *P.* Right. *S.* Now of the knowledge acquired by study part, I presume, is creative and part concerned with education and nurture.<sup>76</sup> Is it not so? *P.* It is. *S.* Let us then take the crafts of production first and see if one section of them is more, and another less dependent on science, and one is to be regarded as purer, and the other as less pure. *P.* Let us do so.

*S.* Now we must separate the arts that govern and direct all the others. *P.* Which are they, and how must we do it? *S.* For instance, if one were to take away from all the arts the sciences of number, measure and weight, what was left in each case would be quite inconsiderable. *P.* Yes, quite. *S.* For I imagine that we should be reduced to conjecture, and a training of the senses by experience and a sort of knack, relying on the faculties of aiming aright, which many people indeed call arts, but the effectiveness of which is only gained by practice and labour. 56 *P.* This is evidently so. *S.* Music in the first place is full of this tendency, is it not, composing harmonies not by measure but by guesswork depending on practice, particularly in the case of all flute-playing which tries to hit the pitch of each string as it sounds,<sup>77</sup> so that it has much in it that is inaccurate and little that is certain? *P.* Very true. *S.* Further, we shall find that medicine and husbandry and navigation and strategy are in the same case. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Yes, but carpentry, which uses a large number of measures and tools, is more truly an art than most forms of knowledge, in virtue of the instruments which give it its great accuracy. *P.* How, pray? *S.* In shipbuilding and housebuilding and many other branches

<sup>75</sup> Here again "truth" is taken as identical with "purity"—that is, freedom from alloy.

<sup>76</sup> This distinction is abandoned in what follows. We hear nothing of the arts of education and nurture, but only of those which are (1) more and (2) less dependent on mathematics, and of (1) pure and (2) applied mathematics. "Art" and "knowledge," or "science," are here practically interchangeable terms.

<sup>77</sup> The text is doubtful, and the precise meaning obscure.

of woodwork, the worker uses a ruler, does he not, and a turning-lathe and compasses, and a square and an ingenious device for making curves? *P.* That is quite true, Socrates. *S.* Let us then distinguish two classes of what are called arts, those which correspond to music in their methods of production, and are less accurate, and those which correspond to carpentry, and are more accurate.<sup>78</sup> *P.* Very well. *S.* And let us class those which we called primary<sup>79</sup> as the most accurate. *P.* You mean, I imagine, the art of number, and those that you named with it just now. *S.* Certainly.

But must we not distinguish two classes in these also, Protarchus? *P.* What do you mean? *S.* Ought we not in the first place to discriminate between the arithmetic of the majority of men and that of the philosophers? *P.* Where do you draw the line between one arithmetic and the other? *S.* The distinction is no slight one, Protarchus; for in the one case the units which are counted are not homogeneous—as for instance, two armies or two oxen, two of the smallest things or two of the largest; but the philosophers would refuse to understand what is meant, unless it is laid down that no single unit in ten thousand is different from another. *P.* Certainly you are right in saying that the distinction among the students of number is no slight one, and it is evidently right to make two classes of them. *S.* Take again the calculation and the measuring in carpentry and commerce as compared with geometry and numeration studied philosophically—are we to treat each pair as two different kinds, 57 or as one only? *P.* On the analogy of what has just been said I should vote for making them two.

*S.* Quite right; and do you see why these examples

<sup>78</sup> And therefore, since accuracy is a subdivision of “truth,” and “truth” one of the elements of the good (and the beautiful), absolutely superior to the others!—No statement in the *Philebus* sounds more strange to a modern ear than this. Our notion of “art” as the creation of beauty by man is simply unknown. It was so much a matter of instinct with the Greeks that they failed to notice it altogether.

<sup>79</sup> They were not, as a matter of fact, called “primary”; but the sense is clear enough.



have been adduced? *P.* Possibly; but I should be glad if you would answer the question. *S.* In my view the argument<sup>80</sup> all through, from the time when we first took it up, has been looking for an analogy to the pleasures, and inquiring whether one science is more pure than another, in the same way as one pleasure is more pure than another. *P.* Yes, it is certainly evident that this has been the object it had in view. *S.* What then? Did it not discover just now that different arts with different objects had varying degrees of accuracy.<sup>81</sup> *P.* Certainly. *S.* And did it not first speak of an art under one name, supposing it to be single, and afterwards treat it as double, and thereupon raise the question of comparative accuracy and exactitude—which, that is, of the two divisions, that of the philosophers and that of the unphilosophical, is the more accurate? *P.* I certainly think that is the question it raises. *S.* Then what is our answer, Protarchus? *P.* Socrates, we have certainly come to recognise an amazing difference among the sciences in point of accuracy. *S.* Then we shall answer all the more easily? *P.* No doubt; and we must certainly say that these arts are far superior to the others, and among them those which enter into the studies of the philosophers are vastly superior to the rest in the accuracy and truth of their treatment of measures and numbers. *S.* Then we will accept this as your opinion, and relying on you we can confidently answer the adepts at verbal quibbling. . . . *P.* How? *S.* By saying that there are two arts of numbers and

<sup>80</sup> The continual personification of the argument marks the practical breakdown of the dialogue-form. We no longer have one mind eliciting from another what was unconsciously there all the time, but a deductive exposition of a preconceived theory, for which the method of question and answer is wholly unsuited.

<sup>81</sup> Truth or purity, which meant freedom from alloy in the case of pleasure, in the case of art or science means abstractness and accuracy. We speak of "pure" mathematics in much the same sense; but the use of the term is only metaphorical, and does not connote a real analogy. The attempt to reduce to a common denominator things essentially disparate is characteristic of the whole dialogue, and largely accounts for its comparative ineffectiveness.

two arts of measure, and others without number similar to them and dependent on them, all exhibiting the same twofold division, but with one common name in each case.

*P.* Let us make this answer to the people you call adepts, Socrates, and hope for the best. *S.* Then it is our view that these arts are the most exact? *P.* Certainly.

*S.* But the faculty of dialectic, Protarchus, would assuredly disown us if we judged any other superior to her. *P.* What must we understand by this faculty? *S.* Surely everyone 58 must know the one I mean. For I certainly think that anyone with even a spark of reason cannot but regard the knowledge that deals with reality and real being, and that the nature of which is unchangeable, as far the truest of all. What do you think? How would you, Protarchus, decide the question? <sup>82</sup> *P.* Well, I certainly used to hear Gorgias say on every occasion, and continually, that the art of persuasion was far superior to the other arts, because it made everything bow to its will voluntarily and without force, and was therefore far the most precious of the arts: and in the present case I should not like to declare against either you or him. *S.* Declare war, I suppose you meant to say; and then shame seized you, and you ran away. *P.* Well, take it how you will. *S.* Now is it your fault or mine, I wonder, that you have mistaken my meaning? *P.* In what respect? *S.* My dear Protarchus, I was not—so far—inquiring which art or which science is superior to the rest in being the greatest and the best and the most useful to us; but which has for its object what is exact and accurate and wholly true, even if it be of next to no practical

<sup>82</sup> Dialectic is the absolute science of the Ideas, the method of evolving and co-ordinating them by the exercise of pure reason. To divine reason the whole universe is deductively necessary; human reason can approximate to a similar perception of the necessity of things with the help of observation and classification. The general formula for the knowledge of the Idea is given at 62a.—The reference to rhetoric is a little surprising. No one who had thoroughly understood the previous discussion would think of taking rhetoric as an instance of purity in art. But Plato had probably been looking up the *Gorgias* of a generation ago, as it touches many of the points treated in the *Philebus*, though, of course, in a far more elementary way.

use,—that is what we are trying to find out at present. Consider : you will not earn Gorgias' enmity if you grant that his art excels in human utility, but declare that the study of which I spoke bears the palm in the same way as we said that a little white colour that is pure is superior to much that is not pure, precisely in its entire truth. And so here, after careful thought and mature reflexion, not looking to any utility or any credit that may attach to the sciences, let us—if there is in our souls a faculty that naturally loves truth, and does all things for its sake—let us say whether it is this faculty to which we should rightly ascribe what we find to constitute purity in reason and thought, or whether we must look for some other that is more authoritative. *P.* Well, I am reflecting ; and it seems to me difficult to allow that any other science or art has a firmer hold on truth than this.

*S.* Now do you say this, because you have seen that most of the arts and those engaged in them  
59 deal, in the first place, with opinions only, and devote all their ardour to the things to which opinions relate ? You perceive, do you not, that those who regard themselves as investigators of nature spend their lives investigating the contents of this world, their origin, and their mutual interactions ? Is that not so ? *P.* It is. *S.* Then it is not to what is eternally, but to that which comes to be, and will or has come to be, that such a man devotes his labours ? *P.* Very true. *S.* Now can we say that there is, in strict truth, any exactness in things that neither have had, nor will have, nor have at this moment any permanence in them ? *P.* Surely not. *S.* How then could we obtain any certain results at all in relation to what has no certainty of any kind in itself ? *P.* Not in any way, I should say. *S.* Consequently there can be no reason and no science in relation to it that has the absolute truth in it. *P.* Presumably not. *S.* Now you must put yourself and me and Gorgias and Philebus altogether out of the question, and simply bear witness to the truth of what the argument now advances. *P.* And that is ? *S.* That certainty and purity and truth and what we call simplicity are either directly connected with the things that are

eternal, absolute, unchangeable and unalloyed, or are nearest akin to them; and all else we must put below and after them. *P.* Quite true. *S.* And surely to the noblest of things we must give none but the noblest of the names that fit them? *P.* Naturally. *S.* But are not reason and thought the names one would honour most? *P.* Yes. *S.* It is then in the case of thoughts about the true reality that these names can be used with accuracy and truth. *P.* Certainly. *S.* And these, and no others, are the very names that I long ago presented as candidates for the purposes of our decision. *P.* What follows, Socrates?

## IV

## THE GOOD

## § 9

*S.* WELL, in the next place, to turn to the question of combining thought and pleasure, one might say with some show of truth that, like craftsmen, we have before us all the elements or the material for our work. *P.* Assuredly. *S.* And now must we not try to effect the mixture? *P.* Well? *S.* It would be better, would it not, if we prefaced our discussion by recalling certain points. *P.* Which? *S.* Those we recalled before: for there seems much sense in the proverb which tells us that a good thing should be repeated over and over again. *P.* Well? *S.* 60 Come then, by all means;—I think that what we said at the beginning was something like this. *P.* What? *S.* Philebus holds that pleasure is the proper mark at which all living things should aim; in fact, that this and no other is the true good for all, and that the two names, good and pleasant, properly apply to one thing with a single nature: but Socrates says that they are not one, but two, as their names indicate, and that the good and the pleasant are essentially different; and that thought comes more within the category of the good than pleasure. Is not that what was said originally, Protarchus? *P.* Certainly.

*S.* And we agreed, I think, at the time, and will no doubt agree now, on a further point. *P.* What is that ? *S.* That there is this in the nature of the good which distinguishes it from everything else. *P.* What ? *S.* That whatever of living things possesses it permanently and completely wants nothing else at all, but has what is absolutely perfect and sufficient. Is it not so ? *P.* Quite so. *S.* Now did we not by way of experiment take each separately, as material for the life of individual men, pleasure unmixed with thought, and similarly thought without the least particle of pleasure ? *P.* That was so. *S.* And did we think that either was sufficient for anyone ? *P.* Of course not. *S.* If however we made any mistake then, it is open to anyone to take up the question again and improve upon our answer, classing memory, thought, knowledge and true opinion together, and considering whether anyone would consent without them to have or acquire anything at all, to say nothing of pleasure, though it were the most frequent or the intensest possible ; it being understood that he could neither have a true opinion of his pleasure, nor even know at all what his feeling was, nor remember it for a moment. Let him also take thought in the same way, and tell us if a man would choose to possess thought divorced from all pleasure, even the slightest, rather than accompanied by some pleasures ; or all pleasures again, without thought, rather than with some thought. *P.* Indeed he would not, Socrates, and there is no need to  
61 ask the question again and again. *S.* Then neither of these conditions would be what is perfect, desirable to all, and absolutely good ? *P.* Of course not.

*S.* Then we must proceed to get a clear idea of the good, or at least an outline of it, in order, as we were saying, that we may know to which candidate to award the second prize. *P.* Quite right. *S.* Well, I think we have already found a way to reach the good ? *P.* What way ? *S.* If, for instance, one were looking for a man, and first ascertained in which house he lived, he would have made a great step towards finding the object of his search. *P.* Of course. *S.* Well, just now it has been indicated to us, as it was at the beginning, that we must

look for the good, not in the unmixed life, but in the mixed. *P.* Certainly. *S.* And we should have a better chance of discerning what we seek in the life that is well mixed than in that which is not? *P.* Much better.

*S.* Then, Protarchus, let us effect the mixture, with a prayer to whichever of the gods it is, Dionysus or Hephaestus or another, that is the patron of the process.

*P.* Certainly. *S.* Well, like cupbearers, we have the running streams before us — pleasure, which we may liken to honey, and thought, a sober and wineless draught, as it were of bitter but health-giving water. These we must try to mix in the best way we can.

*P.* Of course. *S.* Consider then first: should we be most likely to meet with success if we combined all pleasure with all thought? *P.* Perhaps so. *S.* No; it would be dangerous;

but I think I can say what seems to me the safer way.

*P.* And what is that? *S.* We found, I believe, that one pleasure had a truer existence than another, and one art was more exact than another? *P.* Of course. *S.* And science

differed from science, one looking to the things that come to be and perish, and the other to the things that neither perish nor come to be, but exist in eternal and unchanging sameness. The latter, looking from the point of view of truth, we considered to be truer than the former. *P.* Yes,

and quite rightly. *S.* Then would it not be as well if we first mixed only the truest sections of each class, so as to see whether these were sufficient in combination to create for us the ideally desirable life, or if we want anything further that is not of that type? *P.* I certainly think we 62 should do so.

*S.* Let us then suppose a man who knows absolute justice as a reality, and has his knowledge accompanied by a reason, and is of the same mind with regard to the other realities.<sup>83</sup> *P.* Agreed. *S.* Now will his knowledge be adequate if he knows the law of the divine circle and sphere, but is ignorant of this human sphere and these circles we see, and uses in housebuilding and such things unheard-of rules and circles? *P.* Such a state of mind, Socrates, dwelling solely on things suprahuman, we call ridiculous for a

<sup>83</sup> See the preceding note, and the *Excursus*, p. 104.



human being. *S.* What then? Must we throw into the mixture the uncertain and impure art of the false rule and circle? *P.* Indeed we must, if any of us is to find his way home when he wishes! *S.* And music, too, which a little while ago we stated to be full of guesswork and mimicry and lacking in purity? *P.* I certainly think we must, if our life is to be a life in any sense at all. *S.* What do you say, then, if, like a doorkeeper who is pushed and jostled by a crowd, I give way, throw the doors open, and let all the sciences pour in, the less pure and the more, pell-mell? *P.* I must say, Socrates, I do not see what harm it would do if one accepted all the sciences, so long as one has the first. *S.* Then shall I let them all flow into our truly Homeric and poetical "valley of waters"? *P.* Certainly.

*S.* Then in they go; and now we must turn to the spring of pleasures. Our first idea in mixing the two—to take the true portions first—has not succeeded; for our affection for all knowledge has led us to let in the sciences in a body, and in advance of the pleasures. *P.* Very true. *S.* The time has come then to consider whether we must let in all the pleasures, too, or here also only release the true ones first. *P.* It is certainly far safer to set free the true pleasures first. *S.* Let them go, then. And what now? Ought we not, as in the other case, to mix in also such pleasures as are necessary? *P.* Why not? Since they are necessary, we must certainly have them. *S.* Yes, and  
 63 as we found it to be harmless and useful to live knowing all the arts, so now, if we held the same view with regard to the pleasures—if, that is, it is expedient for us and harmless to enjoy all the pleasures through life—we must mix them all in. *P.* What are we to say about them, and how shall we treat them?

*S.* It is not we who ought to be asked, Protarchus, but the forms of pleasure and thought themselves that we should interrogate about each other, as follows. *P.* How? *S.* "Dear ladies—whether one should call you Pleasures, or by some other name—would you not choose to dwell in the company of all thought, rather than apart from thought altogether?" To this, I imagine, there is only one reply that they can make. *P.* And that is? *S.* "That, as was

said before, for any class to be alone and in solitary purity, is neither altogether possible nor desirable : and further, of all classes, comparing one with another, we think that the best to dwell with us is that of the perfect knowledge of all things else and of each of us as far as may be." *P.* " Nay, that is well said," we will reply. *S.* Right. Next then we must interrogate thought and reason. " Have you," we shall ask them in their turn, " any need of pleasures as ingredients in the mixture ? " " What pleasures do you mean ? " they will perhaps say. *P.* Probably. *S.* Yes, and our answer will be this : " Have you," we shall say, " in addition to the pleasures we call true, any need of the very great and intense pleasures as housemates ? " " How so, Socrates," they would say, " seeing that they put innumerable obstacles in our way, troubling the souls in which we dwell, by reason of the madness of pleasure ? They prevent us from coming to birth, to begin with, and cause for the most part the utter destruction of the children we bear, by making men careless and consequently forgetful. But as for the pleasures which you declared to be true and pure, consider them as almost of our own family ; and both these, and those that consort with health and self-control—yes, and all those that follow everywhere in the train of every virtue, like the attendants of a god—these you may add to the mixture. But those which ever accompany senselessness and all evil it would surely be absurd to mingle with reason, if one wishes to have before one the fairest and most harmonious mixture and compound, and try thence to learn what in man and the whole world is essentially good, and what form we must divine it to be."<sup>84</sup> Shall we not say that this reply which reason makes on its own behalf, and on that of memory and right opinion, is truly reasonable and wise ? *P.* Most certainly.

<sup>84</sup> This gives in a succinct form the design of the whole dialogue, and at the same time reveals its essential lack of coherence. We have now analysed the human good, by examining and appraising each of its constituents. The purpose of the succeeding discussion should be to bring to light the underlying principles that have, consciously or unconsciously, determined our decision throughout, and then to build up from these the general notion of the good. Instead of this we have a bald

S. Now here is one thing that is necessary; and without it nothing at all could ever come to be. P. What is that? S. That with which we do not mix truth can never truly come to be, or actually exist.<sup>85</sup> P. How could it? S. It could not. But if anything else is wanting to this mixture, do you and Philebus name it; for to me it seems that our theory is now complete—as it were, an immaterial system to be the perfect law of a living body.<sup>86</sup> P. Consider me of the same opinion, Socrates.

### § 10

S. Then we may perhaps fairly be said to be at the threshold of the Good, and stand before its door. P. I certainly think so. S. Now what are we to regard as the most valuable element in the mixture, and the principal

statement of the elements of the good, and a revaluation on this basis of the constituents of the ideal life. Up to this point the inquiry has been almost wholly inductive in form. The rest is deduction, and deduction of a very meagre description. Obviously, if it were possible to construct the notion of the good *a priori*, the lengthy analysis of the human good was unnecessary: it might simply have been deduced from the more general notion.

<sup>85</sup> This abrupt passage seems to me to defy explanation. We have used the notion of truth again and again in testing the constituents of the ideal life: as far as they are severally concerned, it may now be taken for granted. On the other hand, if all that is meant is that truth must also be a characteristic of "the mixture" as a whole, the next section is the proper place in which to say so. Yet the statement is inserted between the two stages of the discussion, as if it contained some important doctrine not to be found elsewhere. If so, I cannot imagine what the doctrine is. Mr Bury makes the desperate suggestion (*op. cit.*, Appendix F) that truth is wanted not only in the several constituents, and in the mixture, but also "when the combination is in *process* of taking place," and that here it "consists in correct artistic treatment, in due measure of combination with regard to the "ideal type," or "final cause." But why are not measure and symmetry equally necessary?

<sup>86</sup> Literally, "a bodiless order" (*cosmos* in the Greek, generally of the world-system) "that shall rule excellently over an animate body." Another condensed and cryptic saying, valuable as an indication that what has been in view throughout is in fact the Idea, the absolute type, of human character.

cause which makes such a constitution desirable to all men ? For when we have discerned this, we will proceed to inquire whether it is to pleasure or to reason that this universal principle is more closely related and nearer akin. *P.* Quite right, this will be of the greatest use for the purposes of our decision.

*S.* Well, it is not difficult to see the cause of every combination whatever, which makes it either most valuable or worthless. *P.* What do you mean ? *S.* Surely everyone knows this ? *P.* What ? *S.* That unless it attains to measure and the typical character<sup>87</sup> of symmetry any mixture, however effected, spoils all its ingredients, and itself to begin with ;<sup>88</sup> for it becomes no mixture, but a mere uncombined congeries which is in truth a burden to all who possess it. *P.* Very true. *S.* Now indeed we find that the principle of the good has disguised itself by putting on the character of the beautiful. For moderation and symmetry invariably appear as beauty and virtue. *P.* Certainly. *S.* Again we said that truth was added to the ingredients of the mixture. *P.* Quite so. *S.* If then we cannot track the good under one shape, let us take the three, beauty, measure and truth,<sup>89</sup> and say that 65 to these, taken as a single whole, one must ascribe the properties of the mixture ; and that this is the good that makes it good in its turn. *P.* Quite right. *S.* And now,

<sup>87</sup> Literally, as before, "nature."

<sup>88</sup> These then—measure and symmetry—are the two main determinations in the general notion of the good. As regards measure, see the note <sup>71</sup> on p. 161. It is a quality present in the elements of a complex rather than in the complex itself as such. Symmetry, on the other hand, relates rather to the way in which the elements are combined—that is, to the complex as a whole. The good, then—that is to say, the Idea in general, as the "being" to which every "becoming" tends—is an ordered arrangement of parts or elements, each determined as a mean between two extremes.

<sup>89</sup> Truth is added somewhat fancifully. It means, as we have seen, no more than purity ; and this can hardly be taken as one of the essential determinations of the notion. It is rather a postulate or presupposition, and is only given this importance in order to make it clear that mixed pleasures are to be excluded from the ideal type of life.—(See further note <sup>85</sup> above.) For "measure" the text has "symmetry," but the word must obviously be emended.

Protarchus, anyone could judge for us whether pleasure or thought is more akin to the ideal good, and the more precious among men and gods alike. *P.* Clearly; but still it would be better to argue it out.

*S.* Let us then examine the three severally in relation to pleasure and reason; for we must see to which of these two each of them is to be regarded as more akin.

*P.* You mean beauty, truth and measure? *S.* Yes. Take truth first, Protarchus, and then look at the three together, reason and truth and pleasure; give ample time to it, and answer to yourself, whether reason or pleasure is more akin to truth.

*P.* What need is there of time? For I imagine there is a great difference indeed. Pleasure, as the saying goes, is the veriest impostor in the world; <sup>90</sup> and in the pleasures of sex, which are thought the greatest of all, even perjury is condoned by the gods, as if the pleasures were children, without a particle of reason: whereas reason is either the same as truth, or of all things the most like it and the truest.

*S.* Next, then, look at measure in the same way, and see whether pleasure has more of it than thought, or thought than pleasure.

*P.* Here, too, your problem is easily solved; for I presume that nothing more unmeasured could be found than pleasure and enjoyment, nor anything whatever more measured than reason and knowledge.

*S.* Good. But take the third point. Has reason a larger share of beauty than the family of pleasure? Is it more beautiful than pleasure, or pleasure than it?

*P.* Nay, no one, Socrates, either asleep or awake, ever saw or imagined thought and reason to be ugly in any shape or form, either in the past, the present or the future.

*S.* Right. *P.* Whereas evidently there are pleasures, and those perhaps the most intense, which, when we see another enjoying them, we perceive to be either ridiculous or wholly shameful, and we

66 blush for them ourselves, and hide them out of sight as far as we can, consigning them to the night, as if it were wrong for the light of day to see them.

*S.* Then you will affirm it, Protarchus, in every way, telling it to those who are here, and publishing it abroad by messengers, that pleasure is not the first of blessings,

<sup>90</sup> Jowett.



no, nor the second; but that it is primarily in the region of measure and the mean and fitness, and all that we must regard as having this character, that we have caught the ideal type that we seek.<sup>91</sup> *P.* That certainly seems to result from the argument. *S.* And secondly in symmetry and beauty and in perfection and adequacy and all, again, that are of this family. *P.* So it seems. *S.* Then if I divine aright, you would not wander far from the truth, if you put reason and thought in the third place. *P.* Perhaps so. *S.* Further, in the fourth place those things which we attributed to the soul itself, which are called sciences, arts and true opinions—that these come next to the first three, if, as it seems, they are nearer akin than pleasure to the good. *P.* Maybe. *S.* And fifth, then, those pleasures which we defined as painless, and called pure pleasures of the soul itself, resulting some from knowledges and some from sensations. *P.* Perhaps so. *S.* “But at the sixth race,” says Orpheus, “stay the order of your song”: and in truth our argument seems to have found its conclusion at the sixth award. Whereafter we have only, as it were, to give the finishing touches to the discussion. *P.* Then we must do so.

<sup>91</sup> This very singular “order of merit,” which concludes the dialogue, must not be taken too seriously. It evidently includes things which are not really comparable at all. The two first, measure (or the mean) and symmetry, are the general determinations of the good in any sphere; and the fact that measure is mentioned first, is not to be taken as implying that it is in any sense a concept of a higher order than symmetry. (“Truth” is here left out of the question, though there is no particular reason why it should not have been inserted. See note <sup>88</sup> above.) Then follow the constituents of the human good—intellect and the pure mental pleasures. Intellect is here for the first time divided into reason and science, the distinction between the pure and applied sciences being overlooked, as is also that between the æsthetic and non-æsthetic pure pleasures. One can only note these variations as evidence of the unfinished state of the dialogue: they have no peculiar significance. Finally, the reference to the mixed pleasures is so phrased that we are left in doubt whether their existence is to be recognised or not. The whole passage is a not very successful piece of wilful mystification, which has occasioned a great display of mingled credulity and erudition on the part of the commentators.



*S.* Come then, let us for the third time, in honour of Zeus the Preserver, rehearse the argument again and witness to its truth. *P.* Which argument? *S.* Philebus laid it down for us that pleasure, altogether and entirely, constituted the good. *P.* By the third time, Socrates, it seems that you meant a repetition of our discussion from the very beginning. *S.* Yes, but let us hear the rest. I, being aware of the reasons I have just given, and objecting to the view maintained by Philebus, and by thousands of other people too, affirmed that reason was far better and more valuable, at any rate than pleasure, for the life of man. *P.* That was so. *S.* Yes, and suspecting that there were many other things which are equally superior, I said that, if we found anything to be better than either, I should champion reason's claim to the second prize, and that pleasure would  
 67 lose it. *P.* Yes, you said so. *S.* And after that we showed very sufficiently that neither was sufficient. *P.* Very true. *S.* By this line of argument, then, both reason and pleasure equally lost their title to be considered the true good, each of them lacking self-sufficiency and the property of adequacy and completeness. *P.* Quite right. *S.* Yes, but when we found a third that was superior to either of them, we proved that reason was infinitely nearer akin and closer to the type of the victorious life than pleasure. *P.* No doubt.

*S.* Then, according to the judgment that the argument has now delivered, the nature of pleasure would come fifth. *P.* So it seems. *S.* Yes, and it is not first, even though all oxen and horses and every other beast in the world affirm it to be so by their pursuit of enjoyment. It is in their testimony that the majority put their trust, as augurs do in that of birds, so that they judge pleasures to be far the best thing in life; and they consider the loves of beasts truer witnesses than the love one feels for the truths divined by the inspiration of the muse of philosophy. *P.* Socrates, we all admit now that what you have said is absolutely true. *S.* Then I am released? *P.* There is a little left still, Socrates; for I am very sure you will not give up before we do. I will remind you of what remains.

## CONCLUDING ESSAY

### ON THE THEORY OF FORM IN THE *PHILEBUS* AND ITS PLACE IN SCIENCE

THE result of the ethical discussion in the *Philebus* may be summarised briefly enough. The "human good"—that is to say, the ideal life for a civilised man—consists neither of pleasure alone, nor of thought alone, but of a harmonious combination of the two. All forms of intellectual exercise are included, but in the case of the pleasures it is necessary to make a selection. Only the æsthetic pleasures, and those which contain no element of pain and require none as a precedent condition, can properly be regarded as constituents of a perfect state of being.

This unimpeachable conclusion calls for little remark. The "human good," it will be seen, is conceived not as a principle or set of principles governing *conduct*, but as a type of *character*, "a habit or disposition of soul" (11d). Here, as always, it is in the form of a concept, not in that of a law, that Plato discovers the ideal. That the difference, though at first sight disconcerting, is not necessarily fundamental, has already been pointed out (*Introduction*, pp. xi.-xii.). In the present instance it is certainly arguable that the Platonic method has the advantage. In the actual personal relations of life it is by character rather than by conduct that one judges one's fellow-men; and I suspect that most people decide their moral problems by considering what would be proper to the finest disposition they know or can conceive. Personality, it is true, is something higher than the ideal of the *Philebus*; but the ideal of the *Philebus* is something higher than the "categorical imperative."

It is certainly regrettable that Plato did not give his idea a fuller and more concrete expression. What we have is evidently only the barest formal outline. Indeed, the

most important question of all is not even raised. That the ideal life contains the elements enumerated in the *Philebus* will be admitted, but in what proportions and in what arrangement are they to occur? We are told that the combination must be "symmetrical"; but how the symmetry is to be attained, is not even hinted. Can the requirements both of the intellect and of the æsthetic feelings be fully satisfied in the compass of an ordinary life? And if not, which are to go begging? Plato lets it be seen that he hankers after a life in which no feelings either of pleasure or pain have any place at all (see note 36 on page 136); but this is not his ostensible conclusion.

As a whole, the ethical part of the dialogue leaves us with our questions unanswered, though in detail it is rich in suggestion. The analyses of physical pleasure, of desire, of the comic, of the beautiful, are, each in its way, of remarkable interest. These, however—and a number of minor discussions which have been noticed in their places—for the most part explain themselves; but the metaphysical argument requires, and deserves, a more detailed examination.

## I

The theory of form may well be considered Plato's most characteristic achievement. It rivals in importance the analysis of knowledge in the *Theætetus*, and constitutes, indeed, the analysis of being that it requires as its complement.

The commentators appear mostly to regard the discussion of the limit and the unlimited in the *Philebus* as a sort of by-product of Plato's genius—an excursion into Pythagoreanism, to be understood rather as a sign of approaching senility than as a logical outcome of his previous discoveries. It is actually a favourite problem with them how to reconcile it with the "theory of Ideas." From Mr Bury's Introduction (*op. cit.* pp. lxiv.-lxviii.) the inquirer will learn that Brandis, Susemihl, Teichmüller, and others regard the Ideas as identical with the limit (or the "limitants"), that Zeller finds them in Cause,

and Dr Jackson once ascribed them to the "mixed class," while Schneider believes them to be the thoughts of Reason (Cause), and Tocco a combination of unity and multiplicity other than the "mixed class." Mr Bury's conclusion is that "it is certainly difficult to extract any definite Ideal theory from the account of the four classes, while if . . . we try to square the metaphysics of the *Philebus* with that of other Platonic dialogues . . . we find ourselves faced at once with a host of perplexing problems which it would require volumes to discuss exhaustively."

It is not easy to make sense of a situation like this. For either Plato did not himself design any connexion between the theory of matter and form and the theory of Ideas—in which case it is useless to invent one, or indeed to spend much time on his philosophy at all; or else he thought the connexion so evident that he did not even trouble to point it out—in which case the difficulty that scholars have felt in adjusting the two theories might not unreasonably have suggested to them a doubt whether they understood either. I hope to make it plain that the theory of form is simply the "theory of Ideas" itself in its objective aspect; indeed, that the conclusions of the *Theaetetus* lead directly and inevitably to those of the *Philebus*, and that the two investigations together make up one coherent system of metaphysics.

## II

We have seen that knowledge is *a priori*, that its object is a universal, something that is not given in experience but is thought into experience by the mind—though it must, nevertheless, somehow be present there all the time. The last clause belongs more properly to the *Philebus* (16*d*; see the *Introduction*, p. xiii.), and may well serve as the link between the two dialogues. Experience, it has been said, is not the matter of knowledge so much as the occasion for its exercise. We look, as it were, *through* the world of phenomena that is presented to us, and apprehend its underlying structure. We apprehend everything under the form of the specific type which is the law of the class

to which it belongs. It is the type that we know and that, putting aside the individual differences as accidents, we take, on *a priori* grounds, to be the essential reality of the phenomenon. We construct, as the scheme or framework by means of which we rationalise our experience and make it knowable, an ideal world in the shape of a series of universal, typical forms, to which objects as we find them conform.

But this is only one side of the question. In what does the intelligibility, the rational nature of this *a priori* world, consist? Evidently the forms cannot be each unique, separate, and unconnected. That experience, however unaccountable much of it may be, yet somehow corresponds to our reason, is strange enough; but what if this miracle is to be understood as an unending series of miracles—as a countless number of particular correspondences, each unrelated to the others? Plato's myth of *anamnêsis*, the recollection in this life of forms seen in a life before birth, is in part an expression of his sense of this difficulty. Clearly the Ideas, the universal types of things, must be connected together. There must be a reason both for the existence and for the intelligibility of things, other than the fact that they are as they are and that we have been born to see them so. The universe cannot be a haphazard collection of innumerable disconnected species; it can only be a *system* of forms which, to a perfect intelligence, would be seen to be inseparable parts of one deductively demonstrable whole.

This, in fact, is the theory which Plato undertakes to prove in the *Philebus*. He declares classification to be the form that knowledge must ultimately take (see the *Excursus*, pp. 102-104), and correspondingly explains the structure of existence as a classified system of forms. As the necessary complement of the theory of form, he sketches a theory of matter as that which *is formed*, which takes shape in obedience to the law of this or that type; but the ultimate nature of matter is not considered: it is merely defined abstractly as that which is in itself formless, the full theory being reserved for the *Timæus*. It is the forms that make up the intelligible structure of the world, the system at once

of existence and knowledge. Whether the substrate or vehicle of form can be known at all, and if so, in what sense, does not immediately concern us.

### III

To grasp the theory of form in its completeness it is necessary to piece together a number of scattered passages in the dialogue.

In the first section we are told that matter and form are combined in all things (16c), and in the last (64d) that every combination of any value must be characterised by "measure and symmetry." These two statements may be taken as a brief summary of the theory.

Classification is declared to be the solution of all the difficulties of the Ideal theory; and the possibility of classification, and therefore, as we have seen, of knowledge in the true sense, depends on the fact of the "combination" of matter and form (16a-d). Matter is that which is potentially unlimited; for instance, sound, temperature, all kinds of motion and extension. It is characterised by "the more and the less"—that is, the possibility of a progression *ad infinitum* in either direction: from Aristotle's references it appears that the technical term for this notion in the Academy was "the undefined (undetermined) dyad." Matter by itself is, of course, an abstraction. Actually no matter is without at least inchoate form. And it is by the "combination" of matter and form that all concrete existence ("becoming") takes place. That is to say, all phenomena are processes of the information of matter.

And what is the nature of this information? It consists in the reduction of the (potentially) unlimited extension of matter to symmetry and harmony (55e). All form is based on certain mathematical relations—"equality, duplicity, and all the relations of number to number and measure to measure" (25a)—yet not, in fact, as we subsequently see, *all* relations, but only those which have the character of measure, in the æsthetic sense of moderation,



and symmetry. All organized existence is an approximation to an ideal type. The life of an animal depends on its form: pleasure, for instance, is the sense of the reaction to the typical structure after a disturbance of the normal relations subsisting between the parts. It is in perfection of form—in “moderation and symmetry,” that is—that health (25*e*), beauty (26*a*), and virtue (25*b*) consist; and the highest type of human life itself is a “measured” and symmetrical complex of the elements that are the matter of our mental existence.

The type of each class of forms—the law, as we should say, in obedience to which a given matter takes shape—is the Idea. And the totality of the Ideas, the organic system which embraces the types of all things, is conceived by Plato as the Reason of the world, the general Cause of the existence of the universe as we know it (26*e* *sqq.*, 30*a* *sqq.*). This, which may be called the cosmological theory, is, however, barely indicated in the *Philebus*; it is in the *Timæus* and the *Laws* that the doctrine of the world-mind, in common with the doctrine of the ultimate matter, is fully developed. For our present purpose the important point is that the Ideal types are conceived as forming a single system. The fact that they are universally characterised by measure and symmetry, and depend on mathematical or quasi-mathematical relations, already suggests the kind of connexion that subsists between them; but it is in the discussion of classification that the theory is most clearly stated.

#### IV

The connexion of “the one, the many, and the infinite” of classification with the distinction of matter and form is one of Plato’s most singular flashes of insight. His term for the indefinite number of particulars (*apeira*) is the same as that for the indefinite continuum which is matter (*apeiron*). The undifferentiated multitude of examples of a natural class is for us *matter*, in the sense of “the unlimited,” and only becomes intelligible, an object of knowledge, when we have grouped it into classes, each represented by a type. Any genus is, from the point of view of knowledge, a con-

tinuum which stretches from one extreme to the other by a series of imperceptible grades of difference. Science consists in "limiting" this continuum by discerning in it determinate points about which the rest is grouped.

The clearest example of the theory that Plato gives—and the only one common to §1 and §2—is that of music (17*b-e*, 26*a*). Here the notion of the "unlimited" continuum, which is also, from another point of view, the indefinite variety of particulars, is easily grasped. The "matter" of music is evidently an unbroken range of sound from high to low stretching away indefinitely at either end. As a whole, this is a unity—the genus; as a plurality, it falls apart into an unending variety of possible notes; but for science it is divided into groups, each related to a mathematically determined type—that is, to one of the notes of the fixed scale. Plato has not drawn a clear distinction between "measure" and "symmetry" in all cases; but in the case of music it is clear that he would class the determinations of the individual notes as examples of measure, and those of the harmonies as examples of symmetry. And it is on the same principles that we are to conceive every class of matter in the universe as formed. The physical elements in the *Timaeus* are mathematically determined formations of the ultimate formless matter, and at the other end of the scale the World-soul itself (already mentioned in *Philebus*, 30*d*) is symbolically constructed on the same system as the diatonic scale.

This, then, is in main outline the Platonic theory of the universe—of being and of knowledge. Every object in the world that is an organic unity—that has a real and rational existence as a "single form" (*Theaetetus*, 204*a*), a whole of parts—is framed on the lines of a universal type which is the law of the species to which it belongs. It is as an "imitation" of this Idea that the object exists; the Idea is the intelligible reality of which it is the appearance. The type is a symmetrical<sup>1</sup> arrangement of parts,

<sup>1</sup> The expression is here meant to cover "measure" as well. The two notions are not perfectly distinct; and symmetry is on the whole the more important, except, perhaps, in the sphere of morals and æsthetics. See note <sup>88</sup> on page 177.

or, more properly, a symmetrical formation of a specific class of matter, the matter itself being a series of symmetrical formations of matter of an inferior order. Every given class of matter crystallises itself, so to say, at certain mathematically determined points in the continuous series presented by the totality of its possible forms, just as the notes of the diatonic scale occur at fixed points in the range of audible sound. From the primary elements up to the highest manifestations of intelligent life, the world is a single articulate system of superior and inferior types, all alike determined by measure and symmetry.

## V

Once again it is a philosopher—Schopenhauer—who has best caught Plato's meaning. He has done more than criticise and expound: he has professedly adopted the Platonic Idea as an integral part of his own system. The third book of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, which is, I suppose, the best modern treatise on æsthetics, has for its title “die Platonische Idee: das Objekt der Kunst.” It is, however, in the second book, “die Objektivation des Willens,” that the Ideal theory as we have it in the *Philebus* and the *Timæus* is reproduced; and it is worth while to see what shape it took in the mind of a man who had not merely studied it as an ingenious and interesting speculation, but believed it to be true.

Schopenhauer, too, divides the world into matter and form. The ultimate *matter* is Will, the blind “will to live,” the formless stress that “objectifies” itself in the world of appearance (“presentation”), the world of time, space, and causality. The Will is timeless and unique; “it presents itself as entirely and fully in one oak as in millions”; it objectifies itself in an ascending series of *forms* which are the Ideas of Plato, and which, “expressed in unnumbered individuals, stand (*dastehen*) as their unattainable models, as the unalterable forms of things . . . eternal, neither becoming nor changing, while things themselves come into existence and pass out of existence, always *becoming*

and never *being*.”<sup>2</sup> Ideas of the lowest order are natural forces—resistance, fluidity, magnetism, and the rest. Higher in the scale individuality begins to appear—first, perhaps, in the crystal—and the superior Ideas require more and more complexity for their expression. The character of the individual man may be regarded as “a separate Idea, answering to a special act of self-objectification on the part of the Will.”<sup>3</sup> The cosmos as a whole is the Idea to which the other Ideas are related as the single notes to the chord: “beast and plant are the fifth and third of the scale descending from man; the inorganic kingdom is the lower octave.” Through the Will’s essential antagonism with itself each of its phases struggles to express its own Idea in the world of space and time; a higher Idea emerges from the contest of two lower Ideas for the possession of a given matter; it assimilates them, so that each grade of existence presents analogies with those below it. The Idea is the immediate objectivity of the Will on a particular plane; it may be regarded as “a simple act of the Will in which its essence expresses itself more or less fully, while the individuals are in their turn appearances of the Idea—that is, of the act of the Will in time, space, and plurality.”<sup>4</sup>

It will be seen that the main outline of the conception is thoroughly Platonic. In detail, it is true, there are divergences. Natural forces like gravitation at one end of the scale, and individual human characters at the other, are not recognised by Plato as members of the system of Ideas. On the other hand, there is no explicit theory of the nature of form, as such: “symmetry and measure,” as universal determinations of the Idea, are unknown—though the reference to crystals and the musical metaphor for the interrelation of the forms point to some underlying notion of the kind. Nevertheless, the general picture, so to say, of

<sup>2</sup> *Die Welt als Wille*, etc., 3rd edition (1859), p. 154.—Schopenhauer seems not to have known that his matter was no less Platonic than his form; but the coincidence can only be seen in the *Timæus* and the *Laws*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 188. This is un-Platonic. Plato only recognises the Idea of man in general.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184.

the world-process is faithfully reproduced ; and Schopenhauer may well claim to share with Lotze <sup>5</sup> the credit of having penetrated the furthest into Plato's inner meaning.

## VI

But what are we to think of the Platonic theory itself ? Are we to consider it merely as a metaphysical romance—one of those impossibly wilful and fantastic reconstructions of nature of which philosophers have not infrequently been guilty ? Or has it any pretensions to the rank of a scientific hypothesis ?

I have often heard it pointed out, as a fact to be borne in mind in reading Plato, that the doctrine of evolution was unknown to the ancients, and that the theory of immutable types has, of course, been disproved by Darwin. The remark shows an equal failure to understand either the doctrine of evolution or the theory of Ideas.

It seems to be imagined that when Plato describes the Ideas as eternal and unchanging he means it to be a necessary consequence that the species corresponding to them should be everlasting. Whether he actually thought them to be everlasting or not, is a matter of indifference ; what it is important to understand is that from the theory in itself neither inference can be drawn. The eternal validity of the Idea is absolutely independent of the existence or non-existence of a phenomenon corresponding to it in time and space. And, on the other hand, the theory of the origin of species, by the combined action of variation and natural selection, is no more invalidated by the assertion of eternal and immutable types or Ideas, than it is by the assertion of the laws of motion.

Two main propositions are involved in the Platonic theory of form—the first, that every species has a definite normal type ; the second, that this type is not the product of circumstances, but has a law, an inner necessity of its own, so that, if it appears at all, it will appear in its own

<sup>5</sup> See the *Introduction*, pp. xviii.-xx.

form whatever the conditions may be. How do these propositions stand in the light of modern investigations into nature ?

The first—the hypothesis of the existence of a normal type in the case of every species—is now generally accepted, and has in many cases been demonstrated as a fact : it has been found, that is to say, by actual measurements of certain species that there is a central type—that “the number of individuals who deviate more or less markedly from the central type diminishes rapidly as the divergence increases, according to some law peculiar to each race and quality, but which approximates, in some instances very closely, to the theoretical law of frequency of error.”<sup>6</sup>

But it will be said that at the best this can only be regarded as a happy guess on Plato's part, and that to dignify it by adducing the results of the most modern scientific research is absurd. It is true that the Academy had no appliances for microscopic measurement, and that no such thing as a law of the frequency of error was known. Still, I think it may reasonably be maintained that the unaided observation of an eye as keen as that of Plato, guided by as delicate and artistic a sense of the essential character, would give a sufficiently clear conception of the arrangement of the members of a species round a common centre to form a valid “working hypothesis.” And that Plato was not above minute observation is, by a singular literary accident, beyond all doubt. “Who would have dared to assert that Zoology and Botany were objects of investigation in the Academy—formed part, indeed, of the education of the younger members—had not a fragment of the comic poet Epicrates, who wrote for the Attic stage after *circa* 376 B.C., shown us the scholars engaged under Plato's direction in the classification and definition of plants, and lit up the activity of the school

<sup>6</sup> F. Galton on “Discontinuity in Evolution.” *Mind* (New Series), vol. iii. (1894), pp. 362-372.—The results of a large number of such measurements, practically all giving the same result, are collected in H. M. Vernon's *Variation in Animals and Plants*. (Vol. lxxxviii. of the *International Scientific Series*, pp. 12-17: London, 1903.)



like a lightning-flash in the darkness?" Hermann Usener, whose words I have quoted, appears to have been the first to call attention to this fragment, in an essay on "The Organisation of Scientific Work,"<sup>7</sup> which is itself "a lightning-flash in the darkness," and ought to be known by every student of Plato. The fragment is preserved by Athenaeus, and it is worth translating at some length:

- "A. What of Plato, of Speusippus and Menedemus? On what are they spending their days? What thought, what doctrine are they searching out? . . .
- B. Nay, of this I can give certain tidings; for at the Panathenaeon feast I saw a troop of boys in the college of Academia, and heard sayings of strange, unearthly import. For they were defining natural objects, and dividing the life of animals and the essential nature of plants and the kinds of vegetables; in the course of which they came to investigate to what family the cucumber belonged. . . . First, then, they all stood over it mute and voiceless, and crouched, pondering, no little time; till suddenly, while they still crouched and inquired, one of the boys said it was a cylindrical vegetable, and another grass, and another a tree. At which a doctor from Sicily lewdly mocked them. . . . But the boys took no notice, for Plato, who was there, very mildly and without a trace of anger, bade them define the family [of the cucumber over] again; and they went on dividing" (*Epicrates ap. Athenaeus, II. 59c. Meineke, Fragmenta Comitorum Graecorum, vol. iii. Berlin, 1840*).

"Division" was a technical term for classification in the Academy. The lengthy examples of the method given in the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* are quoted by Aristotle as "the divisions." The use of the word by Epicrates implies that it was familiar to the public at large. Whatever an Athenian writer of comedies satirised is certain to have been a matter of common knowledge; and we may take it for granted that the classification of organic species was a well-known peculiarity of Platonic education, and

<sup>7</sup> "Organisation der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit," *Preussische Jahrbücher*, vol. liii. (Berlin, 1884), pp. 1-25.—The essay does not appear to have been reprinted.

that Aristotle's interest in natural history was by no means so new a thing as used to be supposed.

## VII

The second proposition involved in the theory of Ideas is that the form of a species, whether organic or inorganic, is primarily determined by a law of its own; that it is governed not by chance, and the blind operation of forces, but by an inner cohesion which takes the shape of "measure and symmetry."

As applied to inorganic species, the hypothesis is not so original. According to Usener, Plato only shows "a more complete insight into the truth that, since the previous century, had been winning its way more and more to general acceptance—viz. that it is only in so far as all appearances of the inorganic world are determined by mathematical law, that they bear in themselves the quality of unalterability which is the presupposition of scientific knowledge."<sup>8</sup> Plato's theory of the elements, as set out in the *Timæus*, can, in the nature of the case, only be regarded as a provisional conjecture; but it is certainly a testimony to the justice of his instinct that he should have given an explanation which, in its main features, is so curiously like the modern theory. Mendeljeff's law of the periodic recurrence of properties in a scale of the elements arranged according to their atomic weights he would undoubtedly have regarded as a beautiful instance of "measure and symmetry," and the possibility now openly contemplated of a "genetic classification," in which each element finds its place and its properties in a general and literally *deductive* scheme, is precisely what he would have assumed as *a priori* probable.

But, unquestionably, it was the organic world that Plato had chiefly in mind in framing his conception of the symmetrical nature of form; and it is here that the hypothesis is at once most original and most valuable. Again, there is, of course, no question of an absolute demonstration in the

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.* p. 12.

modern scientific sense ; we are dealing only with what is after all the more important element in the process—the presupposition on which investigation is based. It was impossible for Plato to prove his hypothesis—the implements were wanting, and the statistical method had yet to be invented—but that does not prevent it from being a most powerful and illuminating generalisation. It is certain that had such an idea been more familiar to biologists in the past our knowledge of nature would now be much further advanced than it is.

Darwin, it is known, mentioned many instances in which the parts of an organism appeared to be curiously correlated, so that, where one of two apparently disconnected characters was present, the other was almost invariably present also ; but he did not suggest that correlation was a universal phenomenon or an important factor in organic evolution. This view appears to have originated with Galton, who suggested that the comparative permanence of species as we know them was not only due to a common ancestry and the long-continued action of natural selection, but “ that a third cause exists more potent than the other two, and sufficient by itself to mould a race—namely, that of definite positions of organic stability.”<sup>9</sup> That is to say, that there is an essential difference between mere variations, which tend to disappear by regression to the normal centre, and sports, which “ are centred round a different position of stability, and are not merely a strained modification of the original type.”<sup>10</sup>

Stability as a world-principle has recently been discussed by Prof. G. H. Darwin in his Presidential address to the British Association at Cape Town : “ In the world of life the naturalist describes those forms which persist as species ; similarly the physicist speaks of stable configurations or modes of motion of matter ; and the politician speaks of states. The idea at the base of all these conceptions is that of stability, or the power of resisting disintegration ” ; and he expresses “ a doubt whether

<sup>9</sup> *Mind*, *loc. cit.*, p. 364.

<sup>10</sup> Vernon, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

biologists have been correct in looking for continuous transformation of species. Judging by analogy, we should rather expect to find slight continuous changes . . . followed by a somewhat sudden transformation into a new species, or by rapid extinction.”<sup>11</sup> The notion of stability here outlined implies a cohesion or correlation between the parts of an organism that makes it a unity, a single individual whole—a conception for which Plato’s “symmetry” is only a more precise and vivid expression.

The extent to which the existence of symmetry, in this sense of correlation, has been demonstrated by actual measurements in the case of living species may be seen in Mr Vernon’s book.<sup>12</sup> The results are undoubtedly remarkable, and they have been used by several independent investigators to support theories of “discontinuous variation”—of evolution, so to say, *per saltum*, from type to type, rather than by the slow accretion of imperceptible modifications—that are, in principle, the same as Galton’s. There is, in fact, a very general tendency to “limit the unlimited” of possible organic structures by postulating the occurrence of forms determined, literally, by “measure and symmetry,” at intervals in the potentially continuous series—thus “inserting a number between the one and the infinite” in true Platonic fashion.

I do not, of course, suggest that Plato anticipated these theories as they stand. The idea of the variation of species, and even of the survival of the fittest, cannot have been entirely unknown to him, because Anaximander had suggested, a hundred and fifty years before, that human beings must originally have been very differently constituted, since otherwise they would never have survived the earlier convulsions of nature;<sup>13</sup> but there is nothing to show that

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, Wednesday, 16th August 1905.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.* capp. ii. and iii.

<sup>13</sup> Anaximander is reported by Plutarch to have argued that “man originated from animals of a different type, because other animals speedily find the use of their limbs, but man alone required a long period of nursing; hence he could never have survived if he had been the same in the beginning as he now is”: further, that all life first began in water.

Plato himself entertained any such hypothesis. He approached the problem from a totally different point of view; and his theory of form, though it is possible, and even probable, that he may have tried to verify it by observation, is primarily an *a priori* and strictly metaphysical theory. He "judged by analogy," as Prof. Darwin does; or rather, he *deduced* his theory of symmetry in the organic world from his theory of matter and form in general.<sup>14</sup>

Except in a few cases, we do not know in what way or to what extent he demonstrated the concrete operation of "measure and symmetry" in the universe. The *Philebus* gives the main outlines of the theory on the ethical side, and in the *Politicus* the ideal state is described as a symmetrical co-ordination of human characteristics severally determined by measure; but, in general, we are left to do our best with the general metaphysical presupposition and a few scattered hints for its specific application. Even so, if we consider at once the abstract precision of the theory as an organon of classification, and its universal range in the concrete—from the elements of the material world to the highest manifestations of human life and character; from physics and astronomy to art, politics, and morals—it may well stand as one, at least, of the most acute and comprehensive generalisations that the mind of man has conceived. What other intellect than that of Plato could conceivably have constructed both the theory of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* and the theory of being in the *Philebus*, it is not easy to say.

<sup>14</sup> The question of the general character of Greek science, as opposed to modern science, is more germane to the *Timaeus* than to the *Philebus*. All science is at once deductive and inductive; but modern science is more inductive, Greek more deductive. Geometry is the typical Greek science; and almost the only fact known about Euclid is that he was a Platonist.

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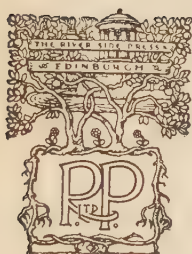


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NOTE.—*A comprehensive Index to Plato's later dialogues will, it is hoped, appear in a subsequent volume.*

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